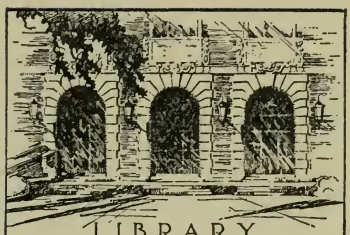

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THE WOODMAN;

A ROMANCE

OF

THE TIMES OF RICHARD III.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE WOODMAN.

CHAPTER I.

Of all the hard-working people on the earth there are none so serviceable to her neighbours as the moon. She lights lovers and thieves. She keeps watch-dogs waking. She is a constant resource to poets and romance writers. She helps the compounders of almanacks amazingly. She has something to do with the weather, and the tides, and the harvest; and in

short she has a finger in every man's pie, and probably more or less effect upon every man's brain. She is a charming creature in all her variations. Her versatility is not the offspring of caprice; and she is constant in the midst of every change.

I will have a moon, say what you will, my dear Prebend; and she shall more or less rule every page of this book.

There was a sloping piece of ground looking to the south east with a very small narrow rivulet running at the bottom. On the opposite side of the stream was another slope as like the former as possible, only looking in the opposite direction. Titian, and Vandyke, and some other painters have pleased themselves with depicting, in one picture, the same face in two or three positions; and these two slopes looked exactly like the two profiles of one countenance. Each had its little clumps of trees scattered about. Each had here and there a hedgerow, somewhat broken and dilapidated; and each too had towards its northern

extremity a low chalky bank, through which the stream seemed to have forced itself, in those good old times when rivers first began to go on pilgrimages towards the sea, and, like many other pilgrims that we wot of, made their way through all obstacles in a very unceremonious manner.

Over these two slopes about the hour of half past eleven, post meridian, the moon was shining with a bright but fitful sort of splendour; for ever and anon a light fleecy cloud, like a piece of swans-down borne by the wind, would dim the brightness of her rays, and cast a passing shadow on the scene below. Half an hour before, indeed, the radiant face of night's sweet queen had been veiled by a blacker curtain, which had gathered thick over the sky at the sun's decline; but as the moon rose high, those dark vapours became mottled with wavy lines of white, and gradually her beams seemed to drink them up.

It may be asked if those two sloping meadows, with their clumps of trees, and broken

hedgerows, and the little stream flowing on between them, was all that the moonlight showed? That would depend upon where the eye of the observer was placed. Near the lower part of the valley, formed by the inclination of the land, nothing else could be perceived; but walk half way up towards the top, on either side, and the scene was very much altered. Gradually rising, as the eye rose, appeared, stretching out beyond the chalky banks to the north, through which the rivulet came on, a large gray indistinct mass stretching all along from east to west, the rounded lines of which, together with some misty gaps, taking a blueish white tint in the moonlight, showed it to be some ancient forest, lying at the distance, probably of two or three miles from the spot first mentioned.

But there were other objects displayed by the moonlight; for as those soft clouds, sweeping rapidly past, varied her light, and cast bright gleams or gray shadows on the ground, every here and there, especially on the south

western slope, a brilliant spot would sparkle forth, flashing back the rays; and a nearer look showed naked swords, and breast-plates, and casques, while every now and then, under the increasing light, that which seemed a hillock took the form of a horse or of a human being, lying quietly on the green turf, or cast motionless down beneath a hedge or an old hawthorn tree.

Were they sleeping there in that dewy night? Aye, sleeping that sleep which fears not the blast, nor the tempest nor the dew, which the thunder cannot break, and from which no trumpet but one shall ever rouse the sleeper.

From sunset till that hour, no living thing, unless it were fox or wolf, had moved upon the scene. The battle was over, the pursuers recalled, the wounded removed; the burial of the dead, if it was to be cared for at all, postponed till another day; and all the fierce and all base passions which are called forth by civil contest, had lain down to sleep before the hour of which I speak. Even the human vulture,

which follows on the track of warring armies to feed upon the spoils of the dead, had gorged itself upon that field, and left the rich arms and housings to be carried away on the morning following.

The fiercer and the baser passions, I have said, now slept; but there were tenderer affections which woke, and through that solemn and sad scene, with no light but that of the moon, with no sound but that of the sighing wind, some four or five persons were seen wandering about, half an hour before midnight. Often, as they went, they bent down at this spot or at that, and gazed at some object on the ground. Sometimes one of them would kneel, and twice they turned over a dead body which had fallen with the face downwards. For more than an hour they went on, pausing at times to speak to each other, and then resuming their examination—I know not whether to call it search; for certainly they seemed to find nothing if they did search,

although they left hardly a square yard of the whole field unexplored.

It was nearly one o'clock on the following morning, when with slow steps they took their way over the rise; and the next moment the sound of horses' feet going at a quick pace broke the silence. That sound, in the absence of every other noise, might be heard for nearly ten minutes; and then all was stillness and solitude once more.

CHAPTER II.

Years had passed, long years, since the little scene took place which I have described in the preceding chapter. The heads were gray which were then proud of the glossy locks of youth. Middle life was approaching old age; and children had become men.

It was evening. The sun had gone down some two hours before; and the lights were lighted in a large comfortable well furnished room. The ceilings were vaulted. The doorways and the two windows were richly decorated with innumerable mouldings; and the

discoloured stone work around them, the clustered pillars at the sides, the mullions which divided the windows, and the broad pointed arches above, spoke that style of architecture known as the early English. The tables, the chairs, the cupboard at the side, were all of old oak, deep in colour and rich in ornament. The floor was covered with rushes, over which, in the centre, was spread a piece of tapestry; and the stone work of the walls between the pillars was hidden by tapestry likewise, on one side representing the siege of Troy, on the other the history of David and Goliath, and on a third the loves of Mars and Venus, which, though somewhat too luscious for our irritable imaginations, did not in those days at all shock the chaste inhabitants of a nunnery. The fourth side of the room was untapestried, for there spread the immense, wide, open chimney, with a pile of blazing logs on the hearth, and, in the open space above the arch, a very early painting of the Madonna and child with gilt glories around the heads of both, and the

meek eyes of the virgin fixed upon the somewhat profuse charms of the goddess of love on the other side.

This is description enough. The reader can easily conceive the parlour of an abbess towards the end of the fifteenth century, the heterogeneous contents of which would be somewhat tedious to detail.

Let no one, however, form a false idea of the poor abbess of Atherston, from the admission into her own private chamber of such very ungodly personages as Mars and Venus. She had found them there when she became abbess of the convent, and looked upon them and their loves as upon any other piece of needlework. Nay, more, had it ever occurred to her that there was anything improper in having them there, she would probably have removed them, though to get a more decent piece of tapestry might have cost her four or five marks. Not that she was at all stiff, rigid, and severe, for she was the merriest little abbess in the world; but she combined with great

gaiety of heart an infinite deal of innocence and simplicity which were perfectly compatible with some shrewdness and good sense. Shut up in a convent at a very early period, exposed to none of the vicissitudes of life, and untaught the corrupting lessons of the world, her cheerfulness had been economised, her simplicity unimpaired, and her natural keenness of intellect unblunted, though there might be here and there a spot of rust upon the blade. It was without her own consent she had gone into a convent, but neither with nor against her wishes. She had been quite indifferent; and never having had any means of judging of other states of life, she was not discontented with her lot, and rather pitied than otherwise those who were forced to dwell in a world of which she knew nothing.

As piety however had nothing to do with her profession, and mortification had never entered into her catalogue of duties, she saw no sin and could conceive no evil in making herself as comfortable and happy as she could. Her

predecessor indeed had done a little more, and had not altogether escaped scandal; but our abbess was of a very different character, performed her ceremonial duties accurately, abstained from everything that she knew or thought to be wrong, and while exacting a fulfilment of all prescribed duties from her nuns, endeavoured to make their seclusion pleasant, by unvarying gentleness, kindness, and cheerfulness. If she had a fault, perhaps it was a too great love for the good things of this life. She was exceedingly fond of trout, and did not altogether dislike a moderate portion of Gascon wine, especially when it was of a very superior quality. Venison she could eat; and a well fed partridge was not unacceptable—though methinks she might have spared it from its great resemblance to herself. All these things, and a great number of other dainties, however, were plentifully supplied by the lands of the convent which were ample, and by the stream which flowed near at hand, or by the large fish ponds, three in number, which lay upon the

common above. Indeed so abundant was the provision for a fast day, that the abbess and the nuns looked forward to it, as it came on in the week, with great satisfaction, from its affording them excuse for eating more fish than usual. Not that they fared ill on the other days of the week; for, as far as forest and lea would go, they were well provided.

To a contented spirit all things are bright; and the good abbess could have been satisfied with much less than she possessed; so I suppose whatever little superabundance existed, went to make the heart merry and the tongue glib; and there she sat with her feet on a footstool, sufficiently near the fire to be somewhat over warm, but yet hardly near enough for that delicious tingling sensation, which the blaze of good dry wood produces till we hardly know whether it is pleasant or painful. In her hand there was a book—a real printed book, rare in those days, and which might well be looked upon as a treasure. As she read, she commented to two young girls who sat near with

tall frames before them, running the industrious needle in and out.

I have called them young girls, not alone to distinguish them from old ones—though that might be necessary—but to show that they had barely reached womanhood. The eldest was hardly nineteen; the other some fourteen or fifteen months younger. Both were beautiful; and there was a certain degree of likeness between them, though the face of the elder had features more clearly, perhaps more beautifully cut, and an expression of greater thoughtfulness, perhaps greater vigour of character. Yet the other was very beautiful too, with that sparkling variety, that constant play of everchanging expression, which is so charming. Its very youthfulness was delightful, for a gleam of childhood lingered still in the look, especially when surprised or pleased, although the lines of the face and the contour of the form were womanly—perhaps more so than those of the other.

That they were none of the sisterhood was evident by the mere matter of their dress, which

also indicated that they had not a fixed intention of ever entering it; for it was altogether worldly in form and material, and though plain yet rich. Seated there, with a near relation, their heads were unencumbered with the monstrous head dresses of the time, the proportions of which, not very long before, were so immense as to require doorways to be widened and lintels raised, in order to let a lady pass in conveniently. Each wore a light veil, it is true, hanging from the mass of glossy hair behind the head, and which could be thrown over the face when required; but it was very different from the veil of the nun or even of the novice.

"Well, my dear children, I do declare," said the elder lady, "this new invention of printing may be very clever, and I wot it is; but it is mighty difficult to read when it is done. I could make out plain court hand a great deal better when written by a good scribe, such as they used to have at Winchester and Salisbury."

The younger girl looked up, answering with

a gay laugh. "The poor people never pretend to make you read it easily, dear aunt and mother. All they say is that they can make more copies of a book in a day than a scribe could make in a year, and that they can let you have for three or four shillings what would cost you three or four crowns from a scribe."

"Ay, that's the worst of it all, child," replied the old lady, shaking her head. "Books will get into the hands of all sorts of common people, and do a world of mischief, good lack. But it can't be helped my children. The world and the devil will have their way; and, even if there were a law made against any one learning to read or write under the rank of a lord at least, it would only make others the more eager to do it. But I do think that this invention ought to be stopped; for it will do a world of mischief, I am sure."

"I hope not," replied the other young lady; "for by no contrivance can they ever make books so cheap, that the lower class can read them; and I know I have often wished I had

a book to read when I have had nothing else to do. It's a great comfort sometimes, my dear aunt, especially when one is heavy."

"Ay, that it is, child," said the abbess. "I know that right well. I don't know what I should have done after the battle of Barnet, if it had not been for poor old Chaucer. My grandfather remembered him very well, at the court of John of Ghent; and he gave me the merry book, when I was not much older than you are. Well a day, I must read it again, when you two leave me; for my evenings will be dull enough without you, children. I would ask sister Bridget to come in of a night, in the winter, and do her embroidery beside me, only if she staid for my little private supper, her face would certainly turn the wine sour."

"But, perhaps we shall not go after all, dear mother," said the younger lady. "Have you heard anything about it?"

"There now," cried the abbess laughing, "she's just as wild to get into the wicked world

as a caged bird, to break out into the open air."

"To be sure I am," exclaimed the light-hearted girl, and oh, how I will use my wings."

The abbess gazed at her with a look of tender, almost melancholy interest, and replied:

"There are limed twigs about them, my child. You forget that you are married."

"No, not married," cried the other with her face all glowing. "Contracted, not married—I wish I was, for the thought frightens me, and then the worst would be over."

"You don't know what you wish," replied the abbess, shaking her head. "A thousand to one, you would very soon wish to be unmarried again; but then it would be too late. It is a collar you can't shake off when you have once put it on; and nobody can tell how much it may pinch one till it has been tried. I thank my lucky stars that made it convenient for your good grandfather to put me in here; for whenever I go out quietly on my little mule, to see

after the affairs of the farms, and perchance to take a sidelong look at our good foresters coursing a hare, I never can help pitying the two dogs coupled together, and pulling at the two ends of a band they cannot break, and thanking my good fortune for not tying me up in a leash with any one."

The two girls laughed gaily; for, to say truth, they had neither of them any vocation for cloisteral life; but the youngest replied, following her aunt's figure of speech, "I dare say the dogs are very like two married people, my aunt and lady mother; but I dare say too, if you were to ask either of them, whether he would rather go out into the green fields tied to a companion, or remain shut up in a kennel, he would hold out his neck for the couples."

"Why, you saucy child, do you call this a kennel?" asked the abbess, shaking her finger at her good humouredly. "What will young maids come to next? But it is as well as it is: since thou art destined for the world and its vanities, 'tis lucky thou hast a taste for them;

and I trust thy husband—as thou must have one—will not beat thee above once a week, and that on the Saturday, to make thee more devout on the Sunday following. Is he a ferocious looking man?"

"Lord love thee, my dear aunt," answered the young lady; "I have never seen him since I was in swaddling clothes."

"And he was in a sorry coloured, pinked doublet, with a gay cloak on his shoulders, and a little bonnet on his head no bigger than the palm of my hand," cried the other young lady. "He could not be ten years old, and looked like some great man's little page. I remember it quite well, for I had seen seven years; and I thought it a great shame that my cousin Iola should have a husband given to her at five, and I none at seven."

"Given to her!" said the abbess, laughing.

"Well," rejoined the young lady, "I looked upon it as a sort of doll——a poppet."

"Not far wrong either, my dear," answered the abbess; "only you must take care how you

knock its nose against the floor, or you may find out where the difference lies."

"Good lack, I have had dolls enough," answered the younger lady, "and could well spare this other one. But what must be must be; so there is no use to think of it.—Don't you believe, lady mother," she continued after a pause, interrupted by a sigh, "that it would be better, if they let people choose husbands and wives for themselves?"

"Good gracious," cried the abbess, "what is the child thinking of? Pretty choosing there would be, I dare say. Why lords' daughters would be taking rosy cheeked franklins' sons; and barons' heirs would be marrying milk-maids."

"I don't believe it," said the young lady. "Each would choose, I think, as they had been brought up; and there would be more chance of their loving when they did wed."

"Nonsense, nonsense, Iola," cried her aunt. "What do you know about love — or I, either for that matter? Love that comes after marriage

is most likely to last, for, I suppose, like all other sorts of plants, it only lives a certain time and then dies away; so that if it begins soon, it ends soon."

"I should like my love to be like one of the trees of the park," said the young lady, looking down thoughtfully, "growing stronger and stronger, as it gets older, and outliving myself."

"You must seek for it in fairyland then, my dear," said the abbess. "You will not find it in this sinful world."

Just as she spoke, the great bell of the abbey, which hung not far from the window of the abbess's parlour, rang deep and loud; and the sound, unusual at that hour of the night, made the good old lady start.

"Virgin mother," she exclaimed—It was the only little interjection she allowed herself. "Who can that be coming two hours after curfew?" and running to the door with more activity than her plumpness seemed to promise, she exclaimed, "Sister Magdalen, sister Mag-

dalen, do not let them open the gate, let them speak through the barred wicket."

"It is only Boyd the woodman, lady," replied a nun, who was at the end of a short passage looking out into the court.

"What can he want at this hour?" said the abbess. "Could he not come before sundown? Well, take him into the parlour by the little door. I will come to him in a minute;" and returning into her own room again, the good lady composed herself after her agitation, by a moment's rest in her great chair; and, after expressing her surprise more than once, that the woodman should visit the abbey so late, she bade her two nieces follow her, and passed through a door, different to that by which she had previously gone out, and walked with stately steps along a short corridor leading to the public parlour of the abbey.

This was a large and handsome room, lined entirely with beautiful carved oak, and divided into two, lengthwise, by a screen of open iron work painted blue and red, and richly gilt. Visitors on the one side could see, con-

verse, and even shake hands with those on the other; but, like the gulf between Abraham and Dives, the iron bars shut out all farther intercourse. A sconce was lighted on the side of the nunnery; and when Iola and her cousin Constance, followed their aunt into the room, they beheld on the other side of the grate, the form of a tall, powerful man, somewhat advanced in life, standing with his arms crossed upon his broad chest, and looking, to say sooth, somewhat gloomy. He might indeed, be a little surprised at being forced to hold communication with the lady abbess through the grate of the general parlour; for the good lady was by no means so strict in her notions of conventual decorum, as to exclude him, or any other of the servants and officers of the abbey, from her presence in the courtyard or in her own private sitting-room; and perhaps the woodman might think it did not much matter whether his visit was made by night or by day.

"Well, John Boyd," said the abbess, "in fortune's name, what brings you so late at

night? Mary mother, I thought it was some of the roving bands come to try and plunder the abbey again, as they did last Martinmas twelvemonth; and we cann't expect such a blessed chance every time, as that good Sir Martin Rideout should be at hand to help our poor socmen. Had it not been for him, I wot, Peter our bailiff would have made but a poor hand of defending us."

"And a poor hand he did make," replied the woodman, in a cynical tone; "for he was nowhere to be found; and I had to pull him out of the buttery, to head the tenants. But I hear no more of rovers, lady, unless it be the men at Coleshill, and King Richard's posts, planted all along the highways, with twenty miles between each two, to look out for Harry of Richmond."

"Posts!" said the abbess; "posts planted on the high way! What mean you by posts?"

"Why men on horseback, lady mother," answered the woodman; "with sharp spurs and strong steeds to bear to Dickon, our king

that is, news of Harry, our king that may be, if he chance to land any where upon the coast."

"Now heaven assoil us!" cried the abbess; "what more war, more war? Will men never be content without deforming God's image in their fellow creatures, and burning and destroying even the fairest works of their own hands?"

"I fear not," answered the woodman, twisting round the broad axe that was hung in his leathern belt. "Great children and small are fond of bonfires; and nature and the devil between them made man a beast of prey. As to what brought me hither, madam, it was to tell you that the wooden bridge in the forest wants repairing sadly. It would hardly bear up your mule, lady, with nothing but yourself and your hawk upon its back; much less a war horse with a rider armed at point. As for my coming so late, I have been as far as Tamworth this morning to sell the bavins, and didn't get back till after dark. So marking

the bridge by the way, and thinking it would be better to begin on it early in the morning, I made bold to come up at night for fear any one, riding along to church or market or otherwise, should find their way into the river, and say the abbess ought to mend her ways;" and he laughed at his own joke.

While he had been speaking, both the young ladies, though he was no stranger to them, had been gazing at him with considerable attention. He was, as I have said before, a tall and still very powerful man, although he seemed to have passed the age of fifty years. His shoulders were very broad, his arms long and muscular; but his body was small in proportion to the limbs, and the head in proportion to the height of the whole figure. His forehead was exceedingly broad and high, however; the crown of his head quite bald with large masses of curling hair falling round his temples and on his neck. What his complexion originally had been, could not be discovered; for the whiteness of his hair and eye-

brows, and the sun-burnt, weather-beaten hue of his skin afforded no indication. His teeth, however, were still good, his eyes large and bright, and the features fine, although the wide forehead was seamed with deep furrows, giving, apart from the rest of his appearance, a look of much greater age than that at which he had really arrived.

His dress was the ordinary woodman's garb of the time, which is well known to almost every one. There was the thick, stiff leathern coat, which no broken branch or rugged thorn could pierce, the breeches of untanned hide, and the boots of strong black leather, reaching above the knee. Round his waist, over his coat he wore a broad belt, fastened by a brass buckle in front, and in it were stuck the implements of his craft, namely a broad axe, which required no ordinary power of limb to wield with the head uppermost, thrust under his left arm like a sword; a large bill-hook, having a broad stout piece of iron at the back, which might serve the purposes of a hammer;

and an ordinary woodman's knife, the blade of which was about eighteen inches in length. His head was on ordinary occasions covered with a round cloth cap; but this, in reverence of the presence of the lady abbess, he held by the edge in his hand.

The expression of the good man's countenance, when not particularly moved, was agreeable enough, though somewhat stern and sad; but when he laughed, which was by no means unfrequent, although the sound was loud and hearty, an extraordinary look of bitter mockery hung about his lip and nostril, taking away all appearance of happiness from his merriment.

"Well, well, you might mend the bridge without asking me," said the abbess in reply to his report. It is a part of the head woodman's duty, and the expences would always be passed. So if you had nothing more to say than that, you might have chosen another hour, goodman Boyd."

"Crying your mercy, lady," said the woodman, "I would always rather deal with you

than with your bailiff. When I have orders from you, I set him at nought. When I do anything of my own hand he is sure to carp However I had more to say. We have taken a score of mallards in the great pond, and a pike of thirty pounds. There are two bitterns too, three heronshaws, and a pheasant with a back like gold. I had four dozen of pigeons killed too, out of the colombier in the north wood; and—"

"Mother Mary, is the man mad?" exclaimed the abbess. "One would think we were going to have the installation of an archbishop."

"And there are twenty young rabbits, as fat as badgers," continued the woodman, taking no notice of her interruption. "If I might advise, lady, you would order some capons to be killed to-night."

The good abbess stood as one quite bewildered, and then burst into a fit of laughter, saying—

"The man is crazed, I think;" but her eldest

niece pulled the sleeve of her gown, whispering—

"He means something depend upon it. Perhaps he does not like to speak before me and Iola."

The abbess paused for an instant as if to consider this suggestion, and then asked—

"Well, have you anything more to say, goodman?"

"Oh, yes, plenty more;" answered the woodman; "when I find a meet season."

"On my word you seem to have found a fish and fowl season;" rejoined the abbess, playing upon the word *meet*. We must recollect that she had but little to amuse herself with in her solitude, and therefore forgive her. She continued however in a graver tone: "Is it that you wish to speak with me alone?"

"Yes, lady," answered the man. "Three pair of ears have generally got three mouths belonging to them, and that is too many by two."

"Then I'll carry mine out of the way, good-

man Boyd;" said Iola, giving him a gay nod, and moving towards the door; "I love not secrets of any kind. Heaven shield me from having any of my own, for I should never keep them."

The woodman looked after her with a smile, murmuring in a low voice, as if to himself—

"Yet I think she would keep other people's better than most." Then, waiting till Constance had followed her cousin from the room, he continued, speaking to the abbess; "you'll have visitors at the abbey, lady, before this time to-morrow night."

"Marry, that is news, good man;" answered the abbess; "and for this then you have made all this great preparation. It must be an earl, or duke at least, if not king Richard himself—God save the mark that I should give the name of king to one of his kindred. Methinks you might have told me this without such secrecy. Who may these visitors be?"

"They are very simple gentlemen, my lady," answered the woodman, "though well

to do in the world. First and foremost. There is the young lord Chartley, a young nobleman with as many good points as a horse dealer's filly: a baron of the oldest race, a good man at arms. He can read and write, and thanks God for it, makes verses when he is in love—which is every day in the week with some one—and to crown all is exceedingly rich as these hard times go."

"You seem to be of his privy chamber, goodman Boyd;" said the abbess; "you deliver him so punctually."

"I deliver him but as his own servants delivered him to me," answered the woodman.

"Tell me, was he not in the battle of Barnet, fighting for the red rose?" inquired the abbess. "Aye, and sorely wounded there. He shall be right welcome, if it were but for that."

"Nay, lord Chartley fought at Barnet;" said the woodman; "and if to fight well and to suffer for the cause of Lancaster merit such high honour, you might indeed receive him daintily, for he fought till he was killed there, poor man;

but this youth is his nephew, and has had no occasion to fight in England either, for there have been no battles since he was a boy. Lancaster he doubtless is in heart, though king Edward put him into the guardianship of a Yorkist. However, with him comes Sir Edward Hungerford, who, they tell me, is one of those gay light-hearted gentlemen, who, born and bred in perilous and changing times, get to think at last, by seeing all things fall to pieces round them, that there is nothing real or solid in the world—no not truth itself. But let him pass: a little perjury and utter faithlessness, a ready wit, a bold heart, a reckless love of mischief, a pair of hanging sleeves that sweeps the ground as he walks along, a coat of goldsmith's work, and a well lined purse, have made many a fine gentleman before him; and I'll warrant he is not worse than the greater part of his neighbours. Then with these two, there is Sir Charles Weinants, a right worshipful gentleman also."

"But tell me more of him," said the abbess.

"What is he? I have heard the name before with honourable mention, methinks—Who and what is he?"

"A lickladle of the court, lady," answered the woodman, "one who rises high by low ladders—who soars not up at once, either as the eagle or the lark, but creeps into favour through holes and turnings. He is marvellously discreet in all his doings, asserts nought boldly, but by dull insinuation stings an enemy or serves a friend. Oh yes, he has his friendships too—not much to be relied on, it is true, but still often useful, so that even good men have need of his agency. All that he does, is done by under-currents, which bear things back to the shore that seem floating out to sea. Quiet, and calm, and self-possessed, he is ever ready for the occasion; and with a cheerful spirit, which one would think the tenant of an upright heart, he wins his way silently, and possesses great men's ears, who little know that their favour is disposed of at another's will. He is an old man now; but I remember him

when I was a boy at St. Alban's. He was then in much grace with the great lord Clifford, who brought him to the notice of king Henry. He has since lived, as much in favour, with Edwards and Richards and Buckinghams, and is now a strong Yorkist. What he will die, Heaven and time will show us."

"Good lack, that there should be such things in the world!" exclaimed the abbess, "but what brings all these people here? I know none of them; and if they come but to visit the shrine, I have no need to entertain them, nor you to make a mystery of their visit. I hate mysteries, my good son, ever since I read about that word being written on the forehead of the poor sinner of Babylon."

The woodman laughed irreverently, but answered, "I want to make no mystery with you lady. These men bring a great train with them; and in their train there is a reverend friar, with frock, and cowl, and sandaled feet; but methinks I have seen a mitre on his shaven crown, though neither mitre nor cowl would

save him from the axe, I wot, if good king Richard got his hands upon him. What he comes for—why he comes, I cannot tell you; for I only heard that their steps tended hitherward, and the lackeys counted on drinking deep of the abbey ale. But when that friar is beneath your roof, you will have a man beside you, whose life is in much peril for stout adherence to the cause of Lancaster."

"Then he shall have shelter and protection here," said the abbess boldly. "This is sanctuary, and I will not believe that Richard himself—bad and daring as he is—would venture to violate the church's rights."

"Richard has two weapons, madam," answered the woodman, "and both equally keen, his sword and his cunning; and take my word for it, what he desires to do that he will do—ay, even to the violation of sanctuary, though perhaps it may not be with his own hand or in his own name. You have had one visit from a roving band who cared little about holy church; and you may have another, made

up of very different men, with whom the king might deal tenderly if they did him good service."

"Then we will call in the tenants," said the abbess, "and defend our rights and privileges."

"The tenants might be outnumbered," said the woodman, shaking his head. "There are many men straying about here, who would soon band together at the thought of stripping the shrine of St. Clare; especially if they had royal warranty for their neck's safety, and the promise of farther reward, besides all their hands helped them to."

"Then what is to be done?" exclaimed the abbess, in some consternation. "I cannot and I will not refuse refuge to a consecrated bishop, and one who has suffered persecution for the sake of his rightful race of kings."

"Nay, Heaven forbid," replied the woodman warmly; "but if you will take a simple man's advice, lady, methinks I could show you a way to save the bishop, and the abbey, and the ornaments of the shrine too."

"Speak, speak," exclaimed the abbess eagerly. "Your advice is always shrewd, goodman Boyd. What way would you have me take?"

"Should you ever have in sanctuary," answered the woodman, "a man so hated by the king that you may expect rash acts committed to seize him, and you find yourself suddenly attacked by a band that you cannot resist, send your sanctuary man to me by some one who knows all the ways well, and I will provide for his safety where they will never find him. Then, be you prepared for resistance, but resist not if you can help it. Parly with the good folks, and say that you know well, they would not come for the mere plunder of a consecrated place, that you are sure they have come seeking a man impeached of high treason who lately visited the abbey. Assure them that you sent him away, which you then may well do in all truth, and offer to give admission to any three or four to search for him at their will. Methinks, if they are privately set on

by higher powers, they will not venture to do anything violent, when they are certain that success will not procure pardon for the act."

The abbess mused and seemed to hesitate; and, after a short pause, the woodman added. "Take my advice, lady. I do not speak without knowledge. Many a stray bit of news gets into the forest by one way or another, that is never uttered in the town. Now, a messenger stops to talk with the woodman, and overburdened with the secret, pours part of it out, where he thinks it can never rise in judgment against him. Then, a traveller asks his way, and gossips with his guide as he walks along to put him in the right road. Every carter, who comes in for his load of wood, brings some intelligence from the town. I am rightly informed lady, depend upon it."

"It is not that. It is not that," said the abbess, somewhat peevishly. "I was thinking whom I could send and how. If they surround the abbey altogether, how could I get him out?"

"There is the underground way to the cell of St. Magdalen," said the woodman. "To surround the abbey, they would have to bring their men in amongst the houses of the hamlet, and the cell is far beyond that."

"True, but no one knows that way," said the abbess, "but you, and I, and sister Bridget. I could trust her well enough, cross and ill tempered as she is; but then she has never stirred beyond the abbey walls for these ten years, so that she knows not the way from the cell to your cottage.—I trust she knows the way to Heaven better;" and the abbess laughed.

"'Twere easy to instruct some one else in the way to the cell," said the woodman. "The passage is plain enough when the stone door is open."

"Aye, doubtless, doubtless," continued the abbess; "but you forget, my good friend, that it is against our law to tell the secret way out to any of the sisterhood, except the superior and the oldest nun. Mary mother, I know

not why the rule was made; but it has been so, ever since bishop Godshaw's visitation in 1361."

"I suppose he found the young sisters fond of tripping in the green wood with the fairies of nights," answered the woodman with one of his short laughs; "but however, you are not forbidden to tell those who are not of the sisterhood: otherwise, lady, you would not have told me."

"Nay, that does not follow," rejoined the abbess. "The head woodman always knows, as the cell is under his charge and care, ever since the poor hermit died. However, I do not recollect having vowed not to tell any secular persons. The promise was only as to the sisters—but whom could I send?"

"Send the young dame who was here but now," said the woodman. "She knows every step of the wood, almost as well as I do, at least as far as my hut; for many is the time I have seen her wandering about, and plucking

the wild flowers, and little thinking that any eye was resting on her."

"Iola? Nay, nay, that cannot be," said the abbess. "She is not of a station to go wandering about at night, guiding strangers through a wild wood. She is my niece, and an earl's daughter."

"Higher folks than she have done as much," answered the woodman; "but I did not think that the abbess of Atherston St. Clare would have refused even her niece's help, to Morton, bishop of Ely."

"The bishop of Ely!" cried the abbess. "Refuse him help? No, no, Boyd. If it were my daughter or my sister, if it cost me life, or limb, or fortune, he should have help in time of need. I have not seen him now these twelve years; but he shall find I do not forget—Say no more, good man, say no more. I will send my niece, and proud may she be of the task."

"I thought it would be so, lady," answered the woodman; "but still one word more. It were as well that you told the good lord bishop

of his danger, as soon as you can have private speech with him, and then take the first hour after sundown to get him quietly away out of the abbey, for to speak truth I much doubt the good faith of that Sir Charles Weinants—I know not what he does with men of Lancaster —unless he thinks, indeed, the tide is turning in favour of that house from which it has ebbed away so long."

Although they had said all they really had to say, yet the abbess and the woodman carried on their conversation during some ten minutes or quarter of an hour more, before they parted; and then the excellent lady retired to her own little comfortable room again, murmuring to herself: "He is a wise man, that John Boyd—rude as a bear sometimes; but he has got a wit! I think those woodmen are always shrewd. They harbour amongst the green leaves, and look at all that goes on in the world as mere spectators, till they learn to judge better of all the games that are playing,

than those who take part therein. They can look out, and see, and meddle as little as we do, while we are shut out from sight, as well as from activity.

CHAPTER III.

Under some circumstances, and upon some conditions, there are few things fairer on this earth, than a walk through a wild forest by moonlight. It must not be, however, one of those deep unbroken primeval forests, which are found in many parts of the new world, where the wilderness of trees rises up, like a black curtain, on every side, shutting out the view, and almost excluding the light of day from the face of the earth. But a forest in old England, at the period of which I speak, was a very different thing. Tall trees there were,

and many, and in some places they were crowded close together; but, in others the busy woodman's axe, and the more silent, but more incessant strokes of time, had opened out wide tracts, where nothing was to be seen but short brushwood, stunted oak, beech tree and ash, rising up in place of the forest monarchs long passed away, like the pigmy efforts of modern races appearing amidst the ruins of those gigantic empires, which have left memorials that still defy the power of time. Indeed, I never behold a wide extent of old forest land, covered with shrubby wood, with here and there a half decayed trunk, rising grandly above the rest, without imagination flying far away to those lands of marvel, where the wonders of the world arose and perished—the land of the Pharaohs, of the Assyrians, and of the Medes; aye, and of the Romans too—those lands in which the power and genius of the only mighty European empire displayed themselves more wonderfully than even in the imperial city, the land of Balbec and Palmyra.

The Arab's hut, built amongst the ruins of the temple of the sun, is a fit type of modern man, contrasted with the races that have passed. True, the Roman empire was destroyed by the very tribes from which we spring; but, it was merely the dead carcase of the Behemoth eaten up by ants.

Be all that as it may, an English forest scene is very beautiful by moonlight, and especially when the air has been cleared by a light frost, as was the case when the woodman took his way back towards his cottage, after his visit to the abbey. The road was broad and open—one of the highroads of the country, indeed—sandy enough, in all conscience, and not so smooth as it might have been; but still it served its purpose; and people in those days, called it a good road. Here, an old oak eighteen or twenty feet in girth, which might have seen the noble ill-fated Harold, stretched its long limbs across the turfy waste ground at its feet, and over the yellow track of the road beaten by horses' feet. In other places the eye might wander

far over a wide scantily covered track of ground, with here and there a tall tree starting up and casting its broad shadow upon the white and glistening expanse of bushes below. A vague sort of mysterious uncertainty hung about the dells and dingles of the wood, notwithstanding the brightness of the moonlight; and a faint, blueish mist prevented the eye from penetrating into the deeper vallies, and searching their profundity. To the left, the ground sloped away with a gentle descent. To the right, it rose somewhat more abruptly; and, peeping over the leafless trees in the latter direction, appeared here and there a square wall and tower, cutting sharp and defined upon the rounded forms of the forest. Above all, stretched out the wide deep sky, with the moon nearly at the full, flooding the zenith with light, while to the north and west, shone out many bright and twinkling stars, not yet hidden by the beams of earth's bright satellite.

With a slow and a firm step, the woodman trudged upon his way, pausing every now and

then to gaze around him, more, apparently, as a matter of habit than with any purpose; for he seemed full of busy thoughts; and even when he stopped and let his eye roam around, it is probable that his mind was on other things, once or twice, murmuring a few words to himself, which had certainly no reference to the scene. "Ah, Mary, Mary," he said, and then added: "Alas! Alas!"

There was something deeply melancholy in his tone. The words were spoken low and softly; and a sigh followed them: the echo of memory to the voice of joys passed.

Onward he walked again, the road somewhat narrowing as he proceeded, till at length the tall trees pressing forward on either side, shut out the light of the moon, except where, here and there, the rays stole through the leafless branches and chequered the frosty turf.

As he was passing through one of the darkest parts of the wood, keeping a good deal to the left of the road, the sound of a horse's feet was heard coming fast down from the top of the

hill. Without change of pace or look, however, the stout woodman walked on, seeming to pay little attention to the measured beating of the ground by the strong hoofs, as they came on at a quick trot. Nearer and nearer, however, they approached, till at length they suddenly stopped, just as the horse and rider were passing the man on foot, and a voice exclaimed, "Who goes there?"

"A friend," replied the woodman. "You must have sharp eyes, whoever you be."

"Sharp eyes and sharp ears too," replied the horseman. "Stand out, and tell us who you are, creeping along there under the boughs."

"Creeping along!" answered the woodman, advancing into the more open road and placing himself in front of the rider. "I will soon tell you who I am, and show you who I am too, master, when I know who it is that asks the question. Since it comes to that, I bid you stand and tell me who you are who ride the wood so late. You are none of King Richard's posts, or you would know me;" and, at the

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same time, he laid his hand upon the man's bridle.

"You are a liar," replied the horseman, "for I am one of King Richard's posts, coming from Scotland, with news of moment, and letters from the princess countess of Arran. Let go my bridle then, and say, who and what you are, or by the Lord, I'll drub you as you have seldom been drubbed before."

"Ha! Say you so?" cried the woodman, still retaining his hold of the bridle. "I must have more satisfactory knowledge of you, ere I let you pass; and, as for drubbing me, methinks with a green willow and a yard or two of rope, I'd give thee that which thou hast not tasted, since thou wert a boy."

"So, so," said the man, "thou art a robber, doubtless. These woods are full of them, they say; but thou shalt find me a tougher morsel than often falls within thy teeth. Take that for thy pains."

As he spoke, he suddenly drew his sword from the sheath, and aimed a rapid and furious

stroke at the woodman's head. His adversary however, was wary; and springing on one side, he escaped the descent of the blade. The other instantly spurred his horse forward; but, before he could pass, the woodman had pulled his axe from his belt, and with a full sweep of his arm, struck a blow at the back of the horseman's head, which cast him at once out of the saddle. It was the back of the axe which he used, and not the sharp side; but the effect seemed equally fatal, for the man neither moved nor spoke, and his horse, freed from the pressure of the rein, dashed down the lane for some way, then stopped, paused for a moment, and trotted quietly back again.

In the meantime, the woodman approached the prostrate body of the messenger, murmuring to himself: "Ah, caitiff, I know thee, though thou has forgotten me. Thou pitiful servant of treachery and ingratitude, thou hireling, serviceable knave, I would not have hurt thee, even for thy master's sake, hadst thou not assailed me first—Methinks he is dead," he con-

tinued, stirring the body with his foot. "I hit thee harder than I thought; but it is well as it is. Thy death could not come from a fitter hand than mine, were it not the hangman's—I will see what thou hast about thee, however; for there may be news of value indeed, if for once in thy life, thou hast found a tongue to speak truth with. But I will not believe it. The news was too sure, the tale too sad to be false."

He stood a moment or two by the corpse, gazing upon it in silence, but without the slightest sign of sorrow or remorse. Those were bloody and barbarous times, it is true, when men slew each other in cold blood after battles were over, when brother spared not brother, and the companions of infancy and boyhood dyed their daggers in each other's gore. Human life, as in all barbarous states of society, was held as nought; and men hesitated as little to spill the blood of a fellow creature as to spill their own. But yet it must surely always be a terrible thing to take a life,

to extinguish that light which we can never re-illume, to fix the fatal barrier which renders every foolish and every dark act, every sin and every crime irretrievable, to leave no chance of penitence, no hope of repentance, and to send the erring and burdened spirit into the presence of its God, without one dark record against it uncancelled. Heavy must be the offence indeed, and deep the injury, which leaves no sorrow in the heart of the slayer.

None seemed to be felt by the woodman. He stood and gazed, as I have said, for a moment; but it was—as he had gazed over the prospect below—without a change of countenance; and then he stooped down and with calm and patient investigation searched every part of the dead man's apparel. He found, amongst other things, a purse well supplied with gold, at least so its weight seemed to indicate; but that he put back again at once. He found some papers too, and those he kept; but not satisfied with that, after some trouble he caught the horse, examined the saddle, un-

loosed the girths, and between the saddle cloth and the leather, found a secret pocket from which he took more papers. These too he kept, and put them in his wallet. Everything else, such as trinkets, of which there were one or two, a pouncet box, some large curiously shaped keys and other trifles, he carefully replaced where he had found them. Then, taking up the dead man's hand, he raised it and let it fall, as if to make sure that life was extinct; and then once more he addressed the corpse, saying—

"Aye, thou art dead enough! I could find in my heart to spurn thee even now—but no, no. It is but the clay. The demon is departed," and picking up his axe, which he had laid down for a moment, he carefully replaced the saddle on the horse's back, fastened up the girths, and cast loose the rein. When this was done he resumed his walk, proceeding with the same quiet steady pace, with which he had been wending his way towards his cottage, the moment before this adventure befell him.

All remained calm and still on the spot which he had left, for somewhat more than an hour. The moon reached her highest point, travelled a little to the westward, and poured her rays under the branches of the trees where before it had been dark. The dead body still lay upon the road. The horse remained cropping the forest grass at the side, occasionally entangling its foot in the bridle, and once plunging to get free so as to bring itself upon its knees. At the end of the time I have mentioned, the woodman reappeared, coming down the hill at the same quiet rate at which he had gone away. When he approached the place he stopped and looked around; and then, stooping down by the side of the dead man, he placed some of the papers in the pocket, saying with a sort of bitter smile, which looked wild and strange in the moonlight—

"Thy comings and goings are over; but others may carry these at least to their destination. Oh thou double-dealing fiend, thou hast died in the midst of one of thy blackest

deeds before it was consummated. The messenger of the dove, thou wert but the agent of the hawk which was watching for her as a prey, and would have betrayed her into all the horrors of faithlessness and guilt. May God pardon thee, bad man! and—"

Again there was the sound of horses' feet coming; but this time it was mingled with that of voices, talking with loud and somewhat boisterous merriment.

"Some of the king's runners," said the woodman; and with a slow step, he retreated under the trees, and was soon lost to sight amidst the thick brushwood. The next moment, two men might be seen riding down the hill and laughing as they came.

"'Twill be pleasant tidings to bear," said one to the other; "and my counsel is, Jago, instead of giving them to the next post, as thy fool's head would have it, that we turn away through the bye-road to the abbey, and carry our good news ourselves. Why that Rich-

mond has put back again to France, is worth fifty broad pieces to each of us."

"But our orders were strict," answered the other; "and we have no excuse.—But mercy have us! What is here? Some one either drunk or dead upon the road. There stands his horse too, under that tree."

"Look to your weapon, Jago;" replied his companion. "On my life, this is that fellow Malcolm Bower, who passed us three hours ago, as proud as a popinjay; and I'll wager a stoup of Canary, that he has met with robbers in the wood and been murdered."

"Likely, likely," answered the other man, loosening his sword in the sheath; "but if he have, king Richard will burn the forest down but he'll find them; for this fellow is a great man with those he serves now-a-days."

"Here, hold my horse;" cried the other. "I'll get down and see;" and dismounting, he stooped over the body, and then proceeded to examine it, commenting in broken sentences, thus—"Aye, it is he sure enough. Stay, he

can't be murdered I think either, for here is his purse in his pocket, and that well filled—and papers too, and a silver box of comfits, on my life. Look ye here now, his horse must have thrown him and broken his neck. No, upon my life it's his head is broken. Here's a place at the back of his skull as soft as a Norfolk dumpling. What shall we do with him ?"

A short consultation then ensued, as to how they should dispose of the dead body, till at length it was agreed that the horse should be caught, the corpse flung over it, and thus carried to the neighbouring hamlet. This was effected without much trouble ; and the whole scene became wild, and silent, and solitary once more.

CHAPTER IV.

I MUST now introduce the reader to a scene then very common in England, but, which would now be sought for in vain—although, to some of the habits of those times, a large class of people have a strong tendency to return. Round a little village green, having as usual, its pond—the merry-making place of ducks and geese—its two or three clumps of large trees, and its two roads crossing each other in the middle, were erected several buildings of very different look and magnitude. Nearly three sides of the green were occupied by mere hovels or huts, the walls of mud, the roofs rudely

thatched, and the windows of so small a size, as to admit very little light into a dwelling, which, during the working hours of each weary day, saw very little of its laborious tenants. Amongst these, were two larger houses, built of stone, richly ornamented, though small in size, having glazed windows, and displaying all the signs and tokens of the ecclesiastical architecture of the day, though neither of them was a church or chapel, but simply the dwelling places of some secular priests, with a small following of male choristers, who were not permitted to inhabit any portion of the neighbouring abbey. Along the fourth side of the green, where the ground rose considerably, extended an enormously high wall, pierced in the centre with a fine old portal with two battlemented turrets, one on either side. From the middle of the green, so high was this wall and portal, that nothing could be seen beyond it. But, from the opposite side, the towers and pinnacles of the abbey itself peeped up above the inclosure.

If one followed the course of the wall, to the

left as one looked towards the abbey, passing between it and the swine herd's cottage, one came to a smaller door—a sort of sally port, we should have called it, had the place been a fortress—from which, a path wound away, down into a valley, with a stream flowing through it; and then turning sharp to the right at the bottom, the little footway ascended again towards a deep old wood, on the verge of which appeared a small Gothic building with a stone cross in front. The distance from the abbey to St. Magdalene's cell, as it was called, was not in reality very great in a direct line; but the path wound so much, in order to avoid a steep rise in the ground and a deep ravine through which in rainy weather flowed a torrent of water, that its length could not be less than three quarters of a mile.

The little door in the abbey wall, which I have mentioned, was strong and well secured, with a loop hole at each side for archers to shoot through, in case of need. Over the door too, was a semicircular aperture,

in which hung an enormously large bell, baptized in former years, according to the ordinary custom, but which, whatever was the name it received at its baptism, was known amongst the peasantry as the "Baby of St. Clare." Now, whether St. Clare, whoever she was, had, during the term of her mortal life, a baby or none, I cannot pretend to say; but certain it is, that the good nuns were as angry at the name which had been bestowed upon the bell, as if the attributing an infant to their patroness, had been a direct insult to each of them individually.

This bell was used only upon special occasions, the ordinary access to the abbey being through the great gates; but, if any danger menaced in the night, if any of the peasantry were taken suddenly ill after sunset, if any of the huts in the hamlet caught fire —which was by no means unusual—or any other business of importance occurred during the hours of darkness, the good people of the neighbourhood applied to the Baby of St. Clare, whose loud voice soon brought out one of the

inferior sisters to inquire what was the matter. Passing on from this doorway, and leaving the path towards St. Magdalene's cell on the left, one could circle round the whole extent of the walls, which contained not less than five or six acres of ground. But no other doorway was to be seen, till the great portal was again reached. The walls themselves were of exceeding thickness, and had a walk all round them on a sort of platform at the top. It would have required cannon indeed to have effected a breach at any point; but at the same time, their great extent rendered them indefensible against the means of escalade, by any force which the good sisters could call to their aid.

Within the great portal, was a large open court, flanked on three sides by habitable buildings. To the right, was what was called the visitors' lodging, where a very considerable number of persons could be accommodated, in small rooms very tolerably furnished according to the mode of the day. There, too, a large dining hall afforded space for the

entertainment to the many guests, who from time to time partook of the abbey's hospitality. The opposite side was devoted to offices for the lay sisters and servants of the abbey; and the space in front of the great gates was occupied by the chapel, into one part of which the general public was admitted, while the other, separated by a richly wrought stone screen, was assigned to the nuns themselves. A small stone passage closed by an iron gate ran between the offices and the chapel, and extended round the back of the former and along the north-western wall to the little doorway which I have mentioned, while, on the other hand, an open door and staircase led to the parlour, which I have mentioned in a preceding chapter, as that in which friends or relatives might converse with any of the recluses, through the grate which divided the room into two. Behind the chapel was another court, cloistered all round, and beyond that the main body of the building.

All these arrangements would seem to show, and indeed, such was the intention, that the

sisterhood were cut off from all immediate communication with the male part of the race; but yet, in truth neither the order nor the abbey was a very strict one—so little so, that twenty or thirty years before, the sisterhood had not altogether escaped scandal. All occasion for gossiping tongues however, had been taken away by the conduct of the existing abbess, whose rule was firm though mild; but at the same time, she neither scrupled to indulge her nuns in all innocent liberty, such as going out once or twice in the year in parties of six or seven together, nor to use her own powers of free action in receiving, even in the interior of the building, during the day time, any of the officers of the abbey, whether lay or clerical, with whom she might wish to speak, and in going out mounted on her mule, and accompanied by several attendants, to inspect the several estates of the foundation, or visit any of the neighbouring towns. This just medium between extreme severity and improper license, secured her against all evil tongues; and the

abbey was in high repute at the time of which I speak.

About one o'clock, on the day after the woodman's visit, which I have described, some twenty or thirty people were gathered together on the green just before the great portal. But this was no well dressed and splendid assemblage, no meeting of the high, the rich, and the lordly. It was a very motley band, in which rags and tatters greatly predominated. The most aristocratic of the crowd, was probably an itinerant piper, who, with an oddshaped cap on his head, somewhat like the foot of an old stocking, but spreading out at the edges in the fashion of a basin, had a good coarse brown cloth coat on his back, and hosen on his legs, which though not new, were not in holes. He kept his bag tight under his arm, not venturing to regale the devout ears of the nuns with the sounds of his merry minstrelsy ; but he promised himself and his fellows to cheer their hearts with a tune after their daily dole had been distributed, to receive which was the object of their coming.

They were not kept long waiting, indeed; for one of the elder sisters soon appeared, followed by two stout serving women, dressed in grey gowns, with white hoods and wimples, each carrying an enormous basket filled with large hunches of bread and fragments of broken meat. The contents of these panniers were distributed with great equity, and savoured with a few words, sometimes of ghostly advice, sometimes of reproach, and sometimes of consolation.

Thus it was, "There Hodge, take that, and do not grumble another time as thou didst yesterday. A contented heart makes food wholesome; and you, Margery Dobson, I do wonder that you do not think it shame to live upon the abbey dole, with those good stout hands of yours."

"Ah, dear mother;" replied the person she addressed, in a whining tone; "that is always the way. Everything goes by seeming. I vow I am dropsical all over; and then folks say it is all fat. I could no more do a day's work

like another, than I could take up the abbey tower and carry it off."

The good sister shook her head, and went on to another, saying—

"Ah! Jackson, if you would but quit your vile drunken ways, you need never come here for the dole. Two hours' work each day would furnish you with as much food as you get here in a week. Ah Janet Martin, my poor thing;" she continued, addressing a woman, who had contrived to add some little scraps of black to the old gown which she wore; "there were no need to give you any of the dole, for the lady abbess will send down to you by and bye; but here, as there is plenty for all to-day, take this for yourself and the babes. I dare say they'll eat it."

The woman made a melancholy gesture with her head, replying merely—

"They have not tasted a morsel since last night, sister Alice."

"Well, take heart, take heart;" answered the nun in a kindly tone. "You can't tell

what may be coming. We are all very sorry for you and for your poor children; and your good husband who is no more, rest his soul, has our prayers night and morning."

"Blessings upon you, sister Alice, and upon the house;" replied the poor widow; and the nun turned to the itinerant musician, saying—

"What, Sam the piper come back from Tamworth. I trust, brother, you remembered all your promises, and did not get drunk at the fair."

"Never was drunk once," replied the piper boldly; but the next moment, he turned his head partly over his shoulder, and winked shrewdly with his eye, adding, "The ale was so thin that a butt of it would not have tipsied a sucking lamb. So I have little credit; for my well seasoned staves would have drank the whole beer in the town without rolling. But nevertheless, I was moderate, very moderate, and drank with due discretion—seeing that the liquor was only fit to season sow's meat. Well, I wot, they got very little grains out of each barrel; and I hope he that brewed

it has had as bad a cholic as I have had ever since."

"Well, get you each to the buttery, one by one as you are served; and there you will get a horn of ale which won't give you the cholic, though it won't make you drunk," said the good sister; and then beckoning to the piper, she enquired in an easy tone: "What news was stirring at Tamworth, Sam Piper? There's always something stirring there I think."

"Bless your holy face," answered the piper; "there was little enough this time. Only just as the fair was over, some gay nobles came in—looking for king Richard I wot; and a gorgeous train they made of it; but if it was the king they sought, they did not find him, for he has gone on to Nottingham with his good queen."

"But who were they? Who were they?" asked the nun, who was not without her share of that curiosity so common among recluses. "And were they so very splendid? How many had they in their following?"

"Why, first and foremost, lady," replied the piper, with a tone and air of secresy and importance, "there was the young earl of Chartley. Marry, a gay and handsome gentleman as ever you set eyes on. I saw him come up to the inn door, and speak to mine host; and every other word was a jest, I'll warrant. What a wit he has, and how he did run on. It was nothing but push and thrust, from beginning to end. Then as for his dress, it might have suited a prince, full of quaint conceits and beautiful extravagance. Why his bonnet was cut all round in the Burgundy fashion, for all the world like the battlements of a castle made in cloth, and a great white feather lolling down till it touched his left shoulder."

"Oh, vanity, vanity!" cried the nun. "How these young men do mock Heaven with their vanities! But what more, good brother?"

"Why then there were the sleeves of his gown," continued the piper; "what they were intended for I can't tell, unless to blow his nose with; but they were so long and fell so

heavy with the sables that trimmed them, that I thought every minute the horse would set his feet on them. But no such thing; and though somewhat dusty he seemed fresh enough."

"Well, well," said the nun. "Come to the point and tell us no more about dress, for I care not for such vanities."

"Good faith, but there were some pieces of it would have made you care;" replied the piper. "However, I do not know what you mean by the point."

"Who were the other people; for you said there were many?" demanded the nun sharply.

"So there were, so there were;" replied the wandering musician. "There was Sir Edward Hungerford, a gay gallant of the court, not so handsome as the other but as grandly dressed; and then there was Sir Charles Weinants, a very reverend and courtly gentleman, with comely gray hair. There—talking of reverencies—there was a godly friar with a gray gown and shaven crown."

"That speaks well for the young lords," observed the nun. "They cannot be such idle little-thrifts as you make them out, if they travel accompanied by a holy man."

"Nay, Heaven forbid that I should make them out idle little-thrifts;" replied the piper. "I think them serious sober-minded gentlemen; for, besides the friar, they had with them, I wot, a black slave, that is to say not quite black, for I have seen blacker, but a tawny Moor with silver bracelets on his arms, and a turban on his head."

"How does that show them serious, sober-minded gentlemen?" asked the nun.

"Because I fancy they must have been to the Holy Land to fetch him," answered the piper; "but what is more to their credit than all else, they love minstrels, for the young lord at their head gave me a York groat, which is more than I had taken in all the fair."

"Minstrels!" cried the nun with a toss of her head. "Marry! call'st thou thyself a minstrel, piper?"

But before her companion could reply, three men rode into the little circle, formed by the houses upon the green, and approached the great portal of the abbey. One of these, by his dress and appearance, seemed to be a principal servant in the house of some great man. Another was an ordinary groom ; but the third was altogether of a different appearance, being a man of almost gigantic stature, dressed in oriental costume, with which, his brown skin, strongly marked features, and large deep black eyes, were in perfect harmony. He wore a crooked scimitar by his side, a short cane spear was in his hand ; and his seat in the saddle of the beautiful black horse he rode, would have distinguished him at once as the native of another land. He was magnificently dressed, as was usually the case with the eastern slaves, of which not a few were to be found in Europe, even at that time ; for although the epidemic madness of the crusades was over, yet the malady from time to time attacked a number of individuals, and we find

that towards the end of the fifteenth century, between two and three hundred thousand persons were assembled from different countries in Rome, with the professed object of making war upon the infidels. They were without leaders, undertook little, and executed less; but if one of the noblemen or gentlemen, who set out upon those wild enterprises, could bring home with him two or three Mahommedan slaves, he thought he had performed a great feat, and judged himself worthy of the name of a crusader.

The very approach of a follower of Mahound, however, was an abomination to the good nun, who had never seen such a thing before; and taking a step back at the aspect of the Moor, she crossed herself devoutly. "Sancta Clara, ora pro nobis," she uttered devoutly, and seemed to derive both consolation and courage from the ejaculation; for she maintained her ground, although the Moor rode close up to her with his companions—nay, she even examined his garb with a critical eye, and inter-

nally pronounced the yellow silk, of which his gabardine was composed, the most beautiful she had ever seen in her life.

She was not subjected to the shock of any conversation with the infidel however; for the person who addressed her was the good looking elderly man, dressed as one of the principal servants of a high family. Dismounting from his horse with due decorum, he presented a letter for the lady abbess, and requested that it might be conveyed to her immediately, saying, that he would wait there for an answer.

The nun pressed him to enter the court and take some refreshment in the visitor's lodging, looking askance at the Moor all the time, and seeming to doubt whether she ought to include him in the invitation. The steward, or whatever he might be, declined, however, stating that he must return immediately when he had received an answer, as to whether the lady abbess would extend her hospitality to his lord; and the nun, usurping the function of the porteress, carried in the letter herself. An

answer was soon brought, by word of mouth, that the Lord Chartley and his friends were right welcome; and the servants departed on the road by which they came. Cooks and scullions were immediately put in requisition, and all the good things, which the woodman had sent up, were speedily being converted into delicate dishes for the table of the guests.

Such a scene had not been displayed in the kitchen of the abbey since the visitation of the bishop; but hour after hour passed by without the arrival of the expected company, till the cooks began to fear that the supper would be spoilt; and the beggars, who had lingered about the gate, in the hope of alms, grew weary of waiting, and dropped off one by one. It was not till the sun had set, and the whole sky was gray, that a distant trumpet was heard, and the sacristan of the chapel, from one of the highest towers, perceived a dark and indistinct mass which might be men and horses coming up the slope of the hill.

CHAPTER V.

Much did the good nuns wonder, why and wherefore such splendid preparations had been made by the abbess, for the reception of a young nobleman and his companions, none of whom, as far as they knew, bore any prominent part in the state. Had it been a bishop, a mitred abbot, or even a dean, they could have understood such a magnificent reception. A duke or a prince would have been worthy of it; but, "Who was Lord Chartley? What claim had he upon the abbey?"

If they were surprised, however, at that which went on in the kitchen—and they all found out sooner or later what was taking place there—previous to the arrival of the guests: if they commented upon the arrangements made for feasting the number of forty in the stranger's hall, while the abbess herself with the old prioress, who was as deaf as a post, proposed to entertain the principal visitors in a room apart, how much more were they surprised when, on its being announced that the train was approaching, the lady herself went out into the court, with her two nieces, and her usual attendants upon state occasions, and waited nearly opposite the principal door of the chapel to receive her visitors in form. Much did they remark upon these facts; and much did they whisper among themselves; but still the abbess pursued her course, though it must be confessed, it was with some degree of perturbation, which was very evident, in a slight degree of nervousness of manner, and

in a variation of colour which was not common with her.

She was not kept in the court long before the first horseman rode through the portal; and without waiting for grooms or horse-boys to come up, the young Lord Chartley himself sprang to the ground, and advancing with an easy and graceful air, bonnet in hand, paid his respects to the superior of the convent. Nay more, with a gay light sort of gallantry, fitted perhaps rather for the court than the cloister, he pressed his lips upon the hand of the abbess, and looked very much as if he would willingly have made them acquainted with the cheeks of the two beautiful girls by whom she was accompanied.

"A thousand thanks, dear lady," he said, "for your kindly welcome. Let me crave pardon for having detained you so long; but some business stopped us by the way. Let me present to you my friends, Sir Charles Weinants, a wise and sage negociator, deep in the secret mysteries of courts, and most discreet in

all his doings—trust him with no secrets, lady," he added, laughing; "for though he may not betray them, he will use them as his high policy may dictate. Then here is Sir Edward Hungerford, the pink of all perfection and the winner of all hearts, the web of whose courtesy is the most superfine, and who is very dangerous to all ladies not under vows. Then here again is my friend, Sir William Arden, whose character you must not take from himself, whose looks are rougher than his intentions, and his words harder than his heart."

"And his heart harder than your head, my good lord," said the gentleman of whom he last spoke, who had just dismounted from his horse. "Marry! my lady abbess, I only wonder how you let such a rattle pated young lordling within your gates. I would not, if I were you; and were he to ride twenty miles further before he got his supper it would do him good."

"Not so, I think," said Sir Edward Hungerford. "I never knew any good come to a

man by riding without his supper, especially when he left bright eyes and beautiful faces behind him;" and, after fixing his look for a moment upon the abbess herself, he glanced meaningly to the faces of her two companions.

"Peace, peace, my children," said the elder lady. "I must not let you forget where you are, and what ears hear you. This is no court, or hall, or place of light amusement. Cease your fine speeches then, and remember this is the abbey of Atherston St. Clare."

"Ay, he would soon make it a ribald's den," said Sir William Arden, bluffly; "but you have forgot the priest, my lord. You should make all reverend people acquainted with each other."

"True, true!" cried Lord Chartley. "This my dear lady, is a very reverend friend of mine, called Father William, who has lived long in foreign lands. Let me recommend him to your especial care and kindness; for he has but feeble health, and will partake of your hospi-

tality for the night, while we, I grieve to say, are forced to ride forward by the moonlight."

He laid strong emphasis on some of his words; and the abbess raised her eyes to the face of the friar, who was gazing at her with a calm and steady look. A glance however seemed enough, for she instantly turned her eyes away again, welcoming the priest in vague and general terms. She then proceeded to explain to Lord Chartley and his companions, that as they had come so late, they must put off their meal till after compline, which would be in half an hour. The service in the chapel, she said, at which she invited them all to attend, would occupy about ten minutes, and in the mean time she gave them over to the lay officers of the abbey, who would attend to their comfort and convenience. After compline, she added, she would receive the gentlemen who had been introduced to her, to sup in the small parlour, while the rest of the party would be entertained in the hall.

Having given this explanation, she was about

to retire; but Lord Chartley, following her a few steps, said something in a low voice, to which she replied :—

"Certainly, my son. You will find me at the grate in five minutes. That passage to the left will lead you."

"There now," exclaimed Sir Edward Hungerford, who had remarked his companion's proceedings. "Chartley is asking her if she can spare him one of those two fair girls to solace his moonlight ride to Leicester. 'Tis thus he always forestalls the market. Upon my life he should give us poor knights a fair chance."

"You would spoil the fairest chance on earth, with your foppery," said Sir William Arden, a strong built, dark complexioned man of about forty. "The bargain is soon struck at all events, for here he comes;" and the young nobleman having rejoined the rest, followed some of the servants of the abbey to the rooms allotted to them, where ewers and towels were prepared to wash before the evening meal.

A very few minutes afterwards, the young Lord Chartley crossed the court, and ascended to the grate across the parlour. There was nobody there; and he looked to the great bell, hesitating whether he should ring it or not. Before he decided however, a light appeared on the other side; and the abbess presented herself, preceded by a nun bearing a taper, who departed as soon as she had set down the light. Lord Chartley was not a man to hesitate or stumble at any step he was inclined to take; but for an instant, he did hesitate on the present occasion; and as the abbess hesitated too, the conversation seemed not likely to begin very soon.

The silence indeed, continued so long, that at length the young lord began to feel, there was something ridiculous in it; and, bursting into a gay laugh, he said, "Pardon my merriment, lady, for I cannot help feeling that it is very absurd to stand thinking of what I shall say, like a school-boy, though, the subject I wish to speak upon is a serious one. I almost

hoped that you would have helped me, for I could not but think that there was a glance of recognition in your eyes, when I introduced to you one of my companions below."

"Nay, my son," replied the abbess; "it was for you to speak. I could not tell that you yourself had cognizance of what you were doing."

"Then you did remember him?" exclaimed Lord Chartley. "That is all well! One part of the difficulty is over, and the greatest. You know that his liberty, if not his life is in peril, if he is discovered. Yet it is needful that he should remain in this neighbourhood for some days, if possible; and he has directed me to ask, if you will give him protection, and, should need be, concealment, on account of friendships long ago."

"Tell him, my lord, I would do so at peril of my life," replied the abbess; "but, at the same time, it is right he should know to what security he trusts. The walls of the abbey are strong and solid; but alas we have not men

enough within call, to defend them in case of need; and I have been warned, that King Richard's people are hunting for him shrewdly. Should they track him here, they may use force which I cannot resist."

"Then, dear lady, you will be free from all blame, if you are compelled to give him up," replied Lord Chartley. "Force cannot be resisted without force; and no one can be censured for yielding to necessity, just as a very brave dog may well turn tail at a lion."

"Nay, my good lord, not quite so," replied the abbess. "We poor women know, that wit will often baffle strength; and, I think I can even provide for his safety, even should the gates be forced and the abbey searched. There is a way out, which no one knows nor can discover, but myself and two others. By it, I can convey him into the heart of the wood, where it would take an army, or a pack of hounds, to find him. I can provide guidance and assistance for him and I trust that we can set his persecutors at nought, though there may be

some peril and some anxiety. Pray tell him all this, that he may consider and choose what he will do."

"Good faith, he has no choice," answered Lord Chartley, "but this, or to go forward to Leicester, into the very lion's mouth. He is brave enough in a good cause, as you would see, if you knew amidst what perils he travels even now."

"Ay, my lord, of that I would fain inquire," replied the nun. "'Tis needful to be cautious—very cautious—in times and circumstances like these; and not even to you would I have said aught, of my remembrance, had you not spoken first. Now, tell me, do your companions know aught, of who it is that journies with them?"

"Not one of them," replied the young lord, "unless it be subtle Sir Charles Weinants; and he affects to see nothing. I have some doubts of him indeed; and if it be as I think, he and the bishop have been playing a game against each other during our whole journey, for somewhat mighty stakes. If you can but give our

friend security for three days, he has won the game."

"God grant it," cried the abbess; "and with the help of the Blessed Virgin, I hope we shall succeed; but I much fear, my noble son, that what we are this day doing, may call down upon us the wrath of Richard of Gloucester."

"I trust not, I trust not, dear lady," replied the young lord. "Were I and my companions and all our train to stay, it might indeed create suspicion; but no one will, or can know that we leave the good priest here to-night, so that if any doubts have arisen, pursuit will follow us in the first place, rather than turn towards the abbey. This is in truth the reason why I ride on to-night. I would rather lure enmity away from you, believe me, than bring it upon you. But, I trust there is no danger. Everything seemed calm and peaceful, when we left Tamworth—No men at arms about, no appearance of doubt or suspicion."

"I do not know, my son. I do not know," replied the abbess. I had warning of your

coming last night. I had warning too, that danger might follow."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lord Chartley, with a look of much surprise. "This is strange news. May I ask who was your informant?"

"One whom I can trust well," answered the abbess, "though he be a man of humble station: none other than our chief woodman, John Boyd. By one means or another, he learns all that takes place in the country round; and he gave me notice, not only that you were on the way hither, but that you had one with you, to whom I should be called upon to give refuge, and for whose safety I must provide. It is to this very man's care and guidance, in case of need, that I must trust the bishop."

"Hush!" cried Lord Chartley, looking round. "Let us mention no names. I am called rash and careless, light and over-gay, but where a friend's safety is at stake, I must be more thoughtful than I would be for myself. Pardon me for my asking, if you are very sure of this good man."

The abbess gave him every assurance in her power, bringing forward all those strong motives for trusting the woodman, which were quite conclusive in her eyes, as they would indeed have been in the eyes of most other ladies, but which did not seem to satisfy her young but more experienced companion. He asked where the woodman lived, and mused; then enquired how long he had been in the service of the abbey; and was still putting questions when the bell for compline rang, and the abbess was forced to retire.

On descending to the court, Lord Chartley found Sir Charles Weinants and the priest, walking up and down before the chapel, not conversing together indeed, for the latter seemed somewhat silent and gloomy. With him, the young nobleman much desired to speak; but he thought that it might be dangerous to connect his conference with the abbess in any degree with the priest, even by addressing him immediately afterwards; and therefore, turning at once to Sir Charles Wei-

nants, he exclaimed: "Now Weinants, let us into the chapel. It is quite dark; and I am somewhat eager for our supper, to fortify us against our evening's ride."

The priest said not a word, but followed the other two as they advanced towards the place of worship, from which the light of tapers and the sweet tones of the chant were beginning to pour forth.

"I am hungry too," replied Weinants, "and agree with you, my good lord, that a good supper is a very necessary preparation for a long ride. I hope they will sing quick, for by my faith, even from Tamworth here, I find, has been a good medicine for a slow digestion.—You need not look round for the others. They are all in waiting eagerly for this grace before meat—except indeed your infidel, who was lolling in the stable with his arms round his horse's neck. I should not wonder if the beast were a princess in disguise, changed into that shape by some friendly magician, in order that she might share his captivity."

"The most probable thing in the world," replied Chartley, "but undoubtedly, were I in his place, I should prefer my lady mistress with less hair upon her face; but come, let us cease our jokes; for here we are; and you will scandalize our reverend friend here."

Thus saying, they entered the chapel and placed themselves by one of the pillars while the service proceeded.

If the ceremonial observances of the Romish church are many, the services have at all events the advantage of being brief; and, on this occasion, the visitors of the abbey were detained for even a shorter space of time than the abbess had mentioned. As soon as the last notes of the chant were over, the abbess and her nuns retired from their latticed gallery; and then, for the first time, she notified to her nieces that she expected them to assist her in entertaining her guests.

"Oh, my dear aunt, pray excuse me," exclaimed Iola, while Constance submitted quite quietly. "I would rather a thousandfold sup

alone in the penitential cell, than with all these men. They have frightened me out of my wits once to-night already, especially that gay gossamer looking youth, whom the young lord called Hungerford."

"I must have it so, Iola," replied her aunt. "I have my reasons for it, so no nonsense, child. As for men," she continued, resuming a gayer tone, "you will soon find, when more accustomed to them, they are not such furious wild beasts as they seem. With them, as with bulls and dogs, they are only dangerous to those who are frightened at them. Treat them boldly and repel them sharply, and they soon come fawning and crouching at your feet. Man is a very contemptible animal, my dear child, if you did but know all. However, you shall sit beside the priest—between him and the young lord, so you will escape the other, who is but one of the empty courtiers of the day, such as I recollect them in my youth—a sort of thing that a woman of spirit could squeeze

to death as she would a wasp in a hawking glove. I dare say Constance does not fear him."

"I would rather not sit near him," replied the other quietly. "His perfumes make me sick. I would rather not live next door neighbour to a civet cat. Let me entertain the bluff old gentleman, aunt. His rough speeches are much more pleasant to my ear than all the other's soft sayings."

"Don't call him old to his face, Constance," replied her aunt, "or his sayings will be rough enough, depend upon it. Why I do not think he is forty, child; and no man ever thinks himself old, till he has told up the seventy, and then he begins to fancy he is growing aged, and had better begin to lead a new life."

The two girls laughed gaily; and, in a few minutes they were seated, as had been arranged, at the plentiful table which had been prepared for their aunt's distinguished guests. I will not pause upon the feast. The reader is well aware of the abundant provision which had been made by the worthy woodman, and would

be but little edified to hear of the strange ways in which the various dishes were dressed, or the odd sauces with which they were savoured.

The meal, as was usual in those days, lasted a long while; and the conversation was somewhat more gay and lively than one would be inclined to imagine was common within the walls of a convent. At first, indeed, it was somewhat stiff and restrained; but there was a gay, careless, happy spirit in the bosom of the young nobleman, who sat beside the abbess, which soon banished the restraint of fresh acquaintance, and made every one feel as if they had known him for years. This was less difficult to effect with the elder lady than with Iola who sat on his other hand; but even she could not resist the current long; and a certain degree of timidity, the natural fruit of retirement from the world, gave way under the influence of his cheerful tone, till she caught herself laughing and talking gaily with him, and suffering unconsciously all the fresh

thoughts of a bright pure heart to well forth like the waters of a spring. She paused and blushed deeply, when first she suddenly discovered that such was the case; and, bending down his head, for the conversation at the moment was general and loud, he said, with a kind and graceful smile, but in a low tone—

"Nay, nay, close not the casket! The jewels are well worthy of being seen."

"I know not what you mean, my lord;" she said, blushing more deeply than before.

"I mean," he answered, "that, judging by your look and sudden pause, I think you have just found out that the door of the heart and the mind has been partly opened to the eye of a stranger, —though it is but by a chink,—and I would fain have you not close it against him, with the key of cold formality. In a word, let us go on as if you had not made the discovery, and do not draw back into yourself, as if you were afraid of letting your real nature come abroad lest it should take cold."

Whether she would or not, a smile came upon her lip; and, after a minute's pause, she answered frankly—

"Well, I will not. It is but for a little time that it can take the air."

At that moment the general conversation seemed to drop; and Lord Chartley saw the eye of the abbess turned towards him.

"It is excellent good," he said aloud, "made into a pie; but, I hate pasties of all kinds, if it be but for hiding under a thick crust, the good things they contain. Nevertheless, it is excellent good."

"What?" asked the abbess.

"A squirrel," replied Lord Chartley. "Oh, there is nothing like your gay, clambering nut-cracker, who scrambles about from branch to branch, drinking the dew of heaven, leaping through the free air, and feeding on the top-most fruits, of which he must ever crack the shell to get at the kernel. He is excellent in a pasty, I assure you. Is he not, Hungerford?"

"Exceeding good," answered the knight, from the other side of the table; "but a young pea-fowl is better."

In this sort of conversation passed the time; and Iola, to say sooth, was amused and pleased. She did not, however, forget to show kind attention to the friar on her right; and he, on his part, seemed pleased and interested by her manner towards him. He spoke little, indeed; but all that he did say was powerful and pointed. Iola, however, could not but remark that he eat hardly anything, while the others seemed to enjoy the dainties prepared for them highly; and she pressed him kindly to take more food.

"I am much fatigued, my daughter," he said aloud, "and do not feel well to-night. The less, therefore, I take, perhaps the better."

Lord Chartley instantly caught at the words—

"Nay, good father," he said, "were it not

better for you to take a little repose in your chamber, before we ride? I have marked all the evening that you seemed ill."

"Perhaps it were as well," answered the friar, rising; "but let me not abridge your enjoyment. I will find my way to my lodging and lie down for a while;" and thus saying, he quitted the room.

The slightest possible smile curled the lip of Sir Charles Weinants. It passed away instantly; but it had been remarked; and, being the most discreet man in the world, he felt that the smile was an indiscretion, and to cover it, asked in a gay but ordinary tone—

"Why, what is the matter with the friar? You have knocked him up, my excellent lord, with your quick travelling. The poor man, I should think, is not accustomed to the back of a hard-trotting horse; and we rode those last ten miles in less than an hour."

"He seems, indeed, a good deal tired," replied Chartley; "but I think it was yesterday's

journey, rather than to-day's, that so much fatigued him. We rode full forty miles before we met with you, and five or six afterwards. You know, I never think, Weinants, or I should have had more compassion."

Here the conversation dropped; and, after sitting at table for about half an hour longer, the whole party rose, and Lord Chartley bade a graceful adieu to the abbess, saying—

"I trust that my poor friend, father William, is by this time well enough to proceed."

"Can you not leave him here, my son?" said the abbess. "He shall be well tended, and gladly entertained."

"Oh, no, no;" replied the young nobleman. "I dare say he is well enough now; and I am bound to my own paternal castle, dear lady, and about to establish for the first time therein, a regular household. I must take him with me, therefore, if it be possible, for an almoner is the first great requisite. Farewell then, with

many grateful thanks for your hospitality. I will not forget the subjects on which we spoke; and they shall have immediate attention."

CHAPTER VI.

The trumpet sounded on the green beyond the walls; and by torch and lantern light, the young lord and his companions mounted in the court before the chapel, and rode forth to join their attendants, after bestowing some rich gifts upon the abbey. Though the sky was not unclouded; for there were large masses of heavy vapour rolling across the southern part of the horizon, and the night was much warmer than that which had preceded, auguring rain to the minds of the weather-wise; yet the moon was bright and clear, displaying every object upon the little

green as clearly almost as if it had been day. Though not very fond of deeds of darkness, young Lord Chartley perhaps might have wished the beams of the fair planet not quite so bright. At all events, he seemed in a great hurry to proceed upon his journey, without any very strict inspection of his band; for he exclaimed at once—

"Now, Arden; now, Weinants; let us on at a quick canter. We shall sleep well to-night."

But the eye of Sir Charles Weinants scanned the party by the moonlight more accurately than that of his companion; and he demanded aloud—

"Why, where is the friar?"

"He is too unwell to ride on to-night. He will follow to-morrow," said Lord Chartley, in a careless tone; and striking his horse with the spur, he proceeded, but not before he had remarked Sir Charles Weinants make a very particular sign to one of his own attendants. The knight raised his finger to his lips, pointed with

his thumb to the abbey, and then held up two fingers of the same hand. No sooner was this done than he shook his rein, and followed his companion, apparently unconscious that he had been observed.

For a minute or two the young lord seemed uneasy, riding on in silence, and frequently giving a sharp glance round to those who came behind; but he soon recovered his equanimity, I might say cheerfulness, for he laughed and talked gaily with those around him, especially when they came to that part of the road, where, passing through the forest, it ascended a hill so steep that the pace of the horses was necessarily slackened. Sir Charles Weinants, for his part, joined in, with his quiet, gentlemanly cheerfulness, and seemed perfectly free and unembarrassed.

The subject of their conversation, it is true, was not a very merry one; for they soon began to speak of the discovery of a dead man lying on that very road, the night before—killed, as was supposed, by a fall from his horse—an account of which they had

received at the abbey, where the corpse was still lying. Light-hearted, superficial man, however, rarely suffers any event which happens to his neighbours, to produce any very deep or permanent impression on himself; and it is wonderful how merry that party of gentlemen made themselves with the fate of the dead man.

"See what it is to go too fast, Weinants," said Lord Chartley. "Doubtless this fellow was riding a hired horse, and thought he might ride him up hill, and down dale, as hard as he liked; and so the poor beast threw him to get rid of an unpleasant burden."

"Served him quite right, I dare say;" said bluff Sir William Arden.

"Why, how can you know, Arden?" demanded Sir Edward Hungerford, who was riding his own beast in the most delicate and approved manner of the times. "He might be as virtuous as an anchorite for aught you know."

"The best man that ever lived," answered Arden, "deserves every hour to break his

neck, and worse too ; and there never yet was a king's courier, which they say this man was, who is not worthy of the pillory from the moment he puts the livery on his back. A set of vermin. I wish I had but the purifying of the court. You would see very few ears, or noses either, walking about the purlieus of the palace ; and as for couriers, I'd set them upon horseback, and have relays of men behind them, to flog them on from station to station, for two or three thousand miles, till they dropped off dead from fatigue and starvation—I would indeed.—They should neither have meat, nor drink, nor sleep, nor rest, till they expired."

Lord Chartley laughed, for he knew his friend well; and Sir Charles Weinants enquired—

"Why, what do the poor wretches do, to merit such high indignation, Arden ?"

"Do !" exclaimed the other. "What do they not do? Are they not the petty tyrants of every inn and every village? Do they not think themselves justified by the beastly livery

they wear, to rob every host and every farmer, to pay for nothing that they take, to drink ale and wine gratis, to kiss the daughter, seduce the wife, and ride the horses to death, because they are on a king's service, forsooth—out upon the whole race of them. We have not a punishment within the whole scope of our criminal law that is not too good for them."

"Hush, hush, Arden;" cried Lord Chartley, laughing again; "if you do not mind, Weinants will tell the king; and it will be brought in high treason."

"How so, how so?" demanded Sir William Arden, with a start; for the very name of high treason was a serious affair in those days, when the axe was seldom long polished before it was dimned again with human blood.

"Why, do you not know the old proverb, 'like master like man?'" asked Chartley; "so that if you abuse the king's couriers you abuse the king himself. It seems to me constructive treason at all events. What say you Hungerford?"

"Very shocking indeed," said the gentleman whom he addressed, yawning heartily; "but I hate all couriers too. They are very unsavoury fellows, give you their billets with hot hands, and bring a hideous smell of horse flesh and boot leather into the chamber with them. I always order those who come to me, to be kept an hour in a chill ante-room, to cool and air themselves."

From the characters of all who surrounded him, Lord Chartley seemed to draw no little amusement; but still, it would appear, his eye was watchful, and his ear too; for, when they had ridden about a couple of miles through the wood, and were in a shady place, where the beams of the moon did not penetrate, he suddenly reined in his horse, exclaiming—

"Some one has left the company—Hark! Who is that riding away?"

"Faith, I know not;" said Sir Charles Weinants.

"I hear nobody," replied Hungerford.

"There go a horse's feet, nevertheless;" cried Sir William Arden.

"Gentlemen all, have you sent any one back?" demanded the young baron, in a stern tone.

A general negative was the reply; and Chartley exclaimed—

"Then, by the Lord, I will find him. Ride on, gentlemen, ride on. I will overtake you soon."

"Let me come with you, my good lord;" said Sir William Arden.

"No, no, I will find him, and deal with him alone," replied the young lord; and, turning his head to add—"You can wait for me at Hinckley if you will," he spurred on sharply, on the road which led back towards the abbey. The party whom he left, remained gathered together for a moment, in surprise at the rapidity and the strangeness of his movements.

"In the name of fortune," cried Sir Edward Hungerford, "why does he not take somebody with him?"

"Every one knows his own business best," said Arden gruffly.

"Hush! hush!" said Sir Charles Weinants. "Let us hear which way he takes."

Now at the distance of perhaps two hundred yards behind them, the road through the wood divided into two: that on the left, by which they had come, leading direct to the abbey and its little hamlet: that on the right pursuing a somewhat circuitous course towards the small town of Atherston. The footfalls of Lord Chartley's horse, as he urged him furiously on, could be clearly heard as soon as Sir Charles Weinants had done speaking; and a moment after they seemed to take a direction to the right. The party still paused and listened, however, till it became clear by the sounds, that the young nobleman had gone upon the road to Atherston.

Then, Sir Charles Weinants drew a deep breath, and said, in an easy tone: "Well, let us ride on. We can wait for him at Hinckley. Doubtless, he is safe enough."

Sir William Arden seemed to hesitate; and Lord Chartley's steward said in a doubtful tone: "I think we ought to wait for my lord."

"You heard what he said himself," replied Sir Charles Weinants. "Our business is to go slowly on, and wait for him at Hinckley, if he does not overtake us by the way."

So was it in the end determined; and the party proceeded at a foot pace in the direction which they had before been taking. Mile after mile they rode on without being overtaken by their companion, every now and then pausing for a minute or two, to listen for his horse's feet, and then resuming their progress, till at length they arrived at Hinckley. They entered the inn yard, just at the moment that the carriers from Ashby de la Zouche to Northampton, usually presented themselves with their packhorses; and they instantly had out landlord and ostlers, and all the retinue of the inn, with lanterns in abundance.

"Stay!" said Sir William Arden, as the attendants were hurrying to dismount, and lead

their lords' horses to the stables. "Please Heaven, we will see who it is that is wanting."

"No need of that," exclaimed Sir Charles Weinants. "We shall learn soon enough no doubt."

But the good knight, who was a steady campaigner, and one of the best soldiers of his day, adhered tenaciously to his purpose, ordered the gates of the inn-yard to be closed, and the doors of the house and of the stables to be shut and locked. He next insisted that the servants should draw up in separate bodies, the attendants of each master in a distinct line, and then made the ostlers carry their lanterns along the face of each.

"One of your men is wanting, Sir Charles Weinants," he said at length. "It must have been he who rode away, and left his company in the forest."

"More fool, or more knave he," replied Sir Charles Weinants, coolly. "He shall be punished for his pains by losing his wages. But, if I am not mistaken, there is another wanting

too. Where is Lord Chartley's Moor? I have not seen him for some time, and do not perceive him now."

"He staid behind in the wood, Sir Charles," replied one of the servants, "to look after the noble lord. He said—let go who would, he would stay there."

"Perhaps, my man staid for the same purpose?" said Sir Charles Weinants.

"No, sir," answered another of the servants, attached to Sir William Arden. "He left us some minutes before Lord Chartley, while we were still riding on through the forest."

"Well, gentlemen, I shall remain here till my friend comes," said Arden, in a marked tone; "for, I do not altogether like this affair."

"And I shall stay, because I have had riding enough for one day; and the inn looks comfortable," said Sir Edward Hungerford.

"I shall ride on, as soon as my horses have been fed and watered," rejoined Sir Charles Weinants, in a cold, resolute tone; "because I

have business of importance which calls me to Leicester."

His determination did not seem very pleasant to Sir William Arden, who looked at him steadily for a moment, from under his bent brows, and then walked once or twice up and down the court, without ordering the doors of the stables to be opened.

Weinants however, took that task upon himself. His horses received their food and devoured it eagerly; and then, just as the carriers were arriving, Sir Charles Weinants rode out of the court yard, bidding his companions adieu in the most perfectly civil and courteous terms.

Sir William Arden suffered him to depart, but most unwillingly it must be confessed, and when he was gone, turned to Sir Edward Hungerford, saying: "I should like to skin him alive, the cold-blooded double dealer. It is very strange, what can have become of Lord Chartley."

"Strange!" said Sir Edward Hungerford, in a tone of affected surprise; "why, he has

gone to say a few more words to that pretty girl at the abbey, to be sure. I should not wonder to see him arrive in half an hour, with the dear little thing on a pillion behind him."

"Pshaw!" said Arden. "You are a fool;" and he turned into the inn.

CHAPTER VII.

It was a dark night; and the appearance of the cottage or hut was, in the inside at least, gloomy enough. The large wooden boards, which shut out wind and storm, covered the apertures that served for windows; and neither lamp nor taper, nor even a common resin candle gave light within. Yet, it was only a sort of half darkness that reigned in the first chamber, as one entered from the forest; for a large fire was burning on the hearth, and a log weighing some hundredweight, had just been put on. The dry unlopped shoots, and withered leaves which still hung around the trunk of the de-

cayed tree, had caught fire first, and the flame they produced went flashing round the walls with a sort of fitful glare, displaying all that they contained.

The room was a large one, larger indeed than many, in buildings with far greater pretensions; for the chief woodman had upon particular occasions, to assemble a great number of his foresters under that roof. Whole deer were often brought in to be broken and flayed, as the terms were, and prepared for cooking, before they were sent down to the more delicate hands of the abbey. Besides, the woodman's house was usually in those days, a place of general hospitality; and, indeed the good ladies of the abbey, always passed right willingly, the charges which he sometimes had to make for the entertainment of strangers and wayfarers on their lands.

As compared with a poor man's cottage of the present day, that of the woodman was a large, but very wretched abode; but as compared with the huts of the ordinary pea-

santry of the time, it was a splendid mansion. The walls were formed of large beams of wood, crossing and supporting each other in various strange directions, forming a sort of pattern or figure inside and out, not unpleasant to look upon. The interstices were filled up with mud, mingled with small gravel stones and thick loam; and the floor was of mud, well battened down and hardened, though, in spite of all care, it presented various inequalities to the foot. Ceiling, as may well be supposed, the chamber had none. Large, heavy, roughly hewn rafters appeared above, with the inside of the thatch visible between the beams. A partition wall, with a rude door in it, crossed the building at about one third of its length, but this wall was raised no higher than those which formed the enclosure, that is to say, about seven or at most eight feet; and thus, though the lower part of the building was divided into several chambers, a clear passage for air, or sound, or rats, or mice, existed immediately under the roof, from one end of the building

to the other. The most solid or massive piece of architecture in the whole structure, was the chimney, with its enormously wide hearth and projecting wings. These were all built of hewn stone, the same as that of which the abbey was composed; and before the cottage was raised around it—for the chimney was built first—the mass must have looked like an obelisk in the midst of the forest.

Although we have greatly abandoned that sort of building at present, and doubtless our houses are more warm and air-tight than those of that day; yet the plan of these large wooden frame-works, with the beams shown on the inside and the out, was not without its convenience. Thus nails and hooks, and shelves and cupboards, were easily fixed in, or against the walls, without any danger of knocking down the plaster, or injuring the painting. Indeed, I do not know what the woodman would have done without this convenience, for the whole walls, on three sides at least, were studded with hooks and pegs, from which were suspended

all sorts of implements belonging to his craft, and a variety of other goods and chattels. There were axes, knives, saws, bills, wedges, mallets, hammers, picks; long bows, cross bows, sheaves of arrows, bags of quarrels, boar spears, nets, and two or three pronged forks, some serrated at the edges like Neptune's trident, and evidently intended to bring up unwilling eels out of their native mud. Then again there were various garments, such as a woodman might be supposed to use, leathern coats, large boots, a cloth jerkin, apparently for days of ceremony, gloves made of the thickest parts of a buck's hide, and a cap almost shaped like a morion, of double jacked leather, which would have required a sharp sword and strong arm to cut it through. But, besides this defensive piece of clothing, which was probably intended rather for the forest than the field, was the ordinary steel cap, back and breastplate of a feudal archer of the period; for each woodman was bound to serve the abbey in arms for a certain period, in case of need.

Hanging from the beams above, was a very comfortable store of winter provision, several fat sides of bacon, half a side of a fallow deer salted and dried, and several strings of large sausages smoked in the most approved manner. Bunches of dried herbs too were there, and a salt fish or two, to eke out the lental soup and eggs upon a fast day.

Within the wings of the large chimney, on a coarse wooden settle, and with his foot resting upon the end of one of the iron dogs or andirons, sat the woodman himself. His arms were crossed upon his chest. His back rested against the wall of the chimney; and his eyes were fixed upon the blazing fire, as if one of those musing fits had seized him, in which eye and fancy are at work, seeing castles, and towers, and landscapes, and faces in the mouldering embers, while the mind, abstracted from the outward scene, is busy in the quiet secrecy of the heart with things of more deep and personal interest. By his side sat a large wolf dog, of a kind not often seen in England, in form like

a gigantic greyhound, covered with shaggy slate-coloured hair, thickly grizzled with gray, especially about the head and paws. His long gaunt jaws rested on the woodman's knee; and sometimes he turned his contemplative eyes upon the fire, seeming to watch it, and muse upon its nature; and sometimes he raised them with a sleepy but affectionate look to his master's face, as if he would fain have spoken to him and asked him, "What shall we do next?"

Not a look did the poor hound get for some time, however, for his master had other things to think of; but at last the good man laid his hand upon the shaggy head, and said "Honest and true, and the only one!"

He then resumed his musing again, till at length the dog rose up, and, with slow and stately steps, advanced to the door, and putting down his nose, seemed to snuff the air from without. The woodman lifted up his head and listened; but the only sounds which were audible were those produced by the footfalls of a horse at a distance; and, turning round to the fire

again with a well pleased look, the woodman murmured, "Good. He is coming this way."

He did not budge from his settle however, nor seem to pay much attention, till the rapid footfalls of the horse seemed to cease altogether, or turn in a different direction. Then he looked up and said, "That is strange. He cannot have missed his way after having twice found it before."

He listened attentively; but still there was no sound audible to his ear; and it was the dog who first discovered that a stranger was approaching. A low growl, and then a fierce sharp bark were the intimations which he gave, as soon as his ear caught the sound of a step, and his master immediately called him to him, saying, "Hither, Ban, hither. Down to foot—down, sir;" and the obedient hound immediately stretched himself out at length beside the fire.

The woodman, in the mean time, gave an attentive ear, and at length distinguished the steps of a man approaching, mixed occasionally with

the slow fall of horses' hoofs upon turfy ground, where the iron shoe from time to time struck against a pebble, but otherwise made no noise. Nevertheless he sat still till the noise, after becoming louder and louder, stopped suddenly, as if the traveller had paused upon a small green which stretched out before the door, comparatively open and free from trees for the space of about three quarters of an acre, although here and there a solitary beech rose out of the turf, overshadowing the greater part of the space. No brushwood was there, however, and the small forest road traversed the green on its way towards the distant town, spreading out into a wide sort of sandy track, nearly opposite to the woodman's house.

As soon as the sound of footsteps ceased, the first inhabitant of the cottage strode across, and threw open the door, demanding, "Who goes there?"

"The answer was as usual—"a friend;" but, before he gave him admission or credence, the woodman was inclined to demand further ex-

planations, saying, "Every man in this day professes himself a friend, and is often an enemy. Say, what friend, and whence?"

The visitor, however, without reply, proceeded to fasten his horse to a large iron hook, which projected from one of the beams of the cottage, and then advanced straight towards the woodman, who still stood in his doorway. The man eyed him as he came near, and then seeming better satisfied, retired a step or two to give him entrance. The traveller came forward with a bold, free step, and without ceremony walked into the cottage, and took a seat by the fire.

"Now let us talk a little, my friend," he said, turning to the woodman; "but first shut the door."

The other did as he was bid, and then turning round, gazed at the stranger from head to foot with a slight smile. After his contemplation was finished, he pulled his own settle to a little distance and seated himself, saying, "Well?" while the large hound, after snuffing quietly at

the stranger's boots, laid his head upon his knee and looked up in his face.

"You are a hospitable man, I doubt not," said the visitor, "and will give me shelter for an hour or two I trust. I have ridden hard, as you may see."

"But not far or long since supper time," rejoined the woodman: "but what want you with me, my lord?"

"You seem to know me," said Lord Chartley, "and indeed are a very knowing person, if I may believe all.—Are you alone here?"

"Yes, we are man to man," answered the woodman with a laugh.

"Is there no one at the back of that door?" demanded Lord Chartley.

"Nothing more substantial than the wind," replied the other. "Of that there is sometimes too much."

"Pray how do you know me?" demanded Lord Chartley.

"I never said I know you," answered the woodman. "Are not your silks and satins,

your gilt spurs, the jewel in your bonnet, to say nothing of the golden St Barnabas, and your twisted sword hilt, enough to mark you out as a lord? But Lord, Lord, what do I care for a lord? However, I do know you, and I will tell you how far it is marvellous. I was in Tamworth yesterday, and saw a man wonderfully gaily dressed, upon a horse which must have cost full three hundred angels, with some forty or fifty followers, all gaily dressed too; so I asked one of the cunning men of the place, who the gay man on the fine horse was, and he answered, it was the young Lord Chartley. Was not that surprising?"

"Not very," replied Lord Chartley laughing; "but what came after was more marvellous; how this cunning man should know that the young Lord Chartley would sup at the abbey of Atherston St. Clare to-night."

"It was," answered the woodman, in the same sort of ironical tone, "especially as the Lord Chartley mentioned his purpose gaily to Sir Edward Hungerford, and Sir Edward Hunger-

ford told it to Sir Charles Weinants, and Sir Charles Weinants to his servant Dick Hagger, who, as in duty bound, told it to Boyd the woodman, and asked if there were really any pretty girls to be seen at the abbey, or whether it was a mere gibe of the good lord's."

"The good lord was a great fool for his pains," said Lord Chartley thoughtfully; "and yet not so much so either, for it was needful to give a prying ass some reason for going."

"Take care, my good lord," replied the woodman, nodding his head sententiously. "Take care that you don't find the prying ass a vicious ass too. Those donkies kick very hard sometimes, and there is no knowing when they will begin."

"Oh, this is a soft fool, replied the nobleman. "I fear him not. There are others I fear more."

"And none too much," replied the woodman, "though this man you fear too little."

Lord Chartley sat and mused for several moments without reply. Then raising his head

suddenly, he looked full in the woodman's face, saying, "Come, come, my friend, we must speak more clearly. If what the abbess told me be true, you should know that we are upon no jesting matters."

"Good faith, I jest not, my lord," said the woodman. "I speak in as sober seriousness as ever I can use in this merry world, where everything is so light that nothing deserves a heavy thought. Why, here the time was, and I remember it well, when taking a man's life without battle or trial, was held to be murder by grave old gentlemen with white beards. Now heads fall down like chesnuts about the yellow autumn time of the year, and no one heeds it any more than if they were pumpkins. Then again I recollect the time when a man confided in his wife and she did not betray him, and might lend his purse to his friend without having his throat cut as payment of the debt. Learned clerks, in those days, sang songs and not lewd ballads; and even a courtier would tell truth—sometimes. It is long ago indeed; but

now, when life, and faith, and truth cannot be counted upon for lasting more than five minutes beyond the little present moment in which we stand, how can any man be very serious upon any subject? There is nothing left in the world that is worth two thoughts."

"Methinks there is," answered Lord Chartley; "but you touch upon the things which brought me here. If faith and truth be as short lived as you would have it, master woodman, how would you, that either the abbess or I, or a person, to whom I will at present give no name, should trust you in a matter where his life, aye, and more than his life is perilled?"

"Faith, only as a dire necessity," answered the woodman, in an indifferent tone, "and because there is none other whom you can trust. The abbess will trust me, perhaps, because she knows me; you, because it is too late to think of any other means; and your nameless person, because he cannot help it."

"I know not that it is too late," replied Lord Chartley. "You have not got the tally board

so completely in your hand, my friend, as to run up the score without looking at the other side. But in a word, I have made a good excuse to leave my friends and servants, in order to see whether I could obtain some warrant for trusting you, in a matter of such deep importance as that which may perhaps be soon cast upon you."

"The best of all warrants for a man's good faith, my lord," answered the woodman, "is the certainty that he can gain nothing by breaking it. Now to speak plainly, I knew yesterday that good old Father Morton, bishop of Ely, was housed at Tamworth under the gown of a friar. To-night I know that he is lodged in the abbey. Had it so pleased me either yesterday or to-day, I could have brought over as many of King Richard's bands from Coleshill, as would have soon conveyed his right reverence to the tower, and if reward is to be got, could have got it. Therefore, it is not a bit more likely that I should betray him, were he

now standing under this roof, than yesterday in Tamworth, or to-day at Atherston St. Clare?"

"There is some truth in what you say," answered Lord Chartley; "and I believe the best plan is to let a good dog beat the ground his own way. Yet I would fain know, how you were informed that such a person was with me."

"What has that to do with the matter?" answered the woodman. "Take it all for granted. You see I am informed. What matters how?"

"Because it is somewhat suspicious," answered Lord Chartley at once, "that you should gain intelligence having no reference to your calling or station, while others both shrewd and watchful, have gained none."

"I have no intelligence," replied the woodman. "Everything is simple enough when we look at it close. I saw the bishop dismount, knew him, and understood the whole business in a minute. He was kind to some whom I loved in years long past; and I do not forget

faces—That is all. But now, my good lord, you have somewhat squeezed me with examinations. Let me ask you a question or two, of quite as much moment. On what excuse did you leave your friends and servants?"

"Good faith, you know so much," replied Lord Chartley, "that methinks you might know that also. However, as I must trust you in more weighty matters, I may as well tell that too. I have some doubts of one of our party, who joined us just on the other side of Tamworth, and has adhered closely to us ever since."

"Like a wet boot to a swelled ancle, I will answer for it," said the woodman, "if you mean the knave Weinants."

"I mean no other," answered Lord Chartley; "but however to my tale;" and he proceeded to relate all that had occurred that night in the wood. "I did not follow the man, I pretended to follow," he continued, "because I knew that was in vain. He had got too far away from me; and, moreover, had I caught

him, what could I have done? I have no power over Sir Charles Weinant's servants, and he had but to name his lord, and plead his orders, and my authority was at an end; but as the good lady abbess was very confident she could, by your help, insure our friend's safety, even should the abbey be searched, I came hither to make myself more sure, by talking with you myself."

While the young nobleman had been speaking, the woodman had risen up, with a somewhat eager and anxious eye, but continued gazing upon him, without interrupting him, till he had done.

"This must be looked to," he said at length. "There is no time to be lost. Are you sure these excellent friends of yours have gone on?"

"So I besought them," answered the other.

"Besought them!" said the woodman. "We must have better security than beseechings;" and taking a horn that was hanging

against the wall, he went to the door and blew two notes, twice repeated.

"We shall soon have some tidings," he said; returning into the hut. "I have got my deer keepers watching in different places; for our rogues here are fond of venison, as well as their neighbours, and care not much whether it be in or out of season."

"So then you are head keeper, as well as head woodman," said Lord Chartley.

"Aye, my lord," answered the other. "We have no fine degrees and distinctions here. We mix all trades together, woodman, verderers, keepers, rangers. 'Tis not like a royal forest, nor an earl's park, where no man ventures out of his own walk. This Sir Charles Weinants," he continued, in a musing tone; "so he joined you on the other side of Tamworth. 'Tis strange he did not betray you earlier."

"He seemed not to know there was anything to betray," replied the young lord; "looked innocent and unconscious, and talked

of points and doublets, and the qualities of Spanish leather, women, and perfumes, with Sir Edward Hungerford; or of horses, and suits of armour, cannon, and such like things, with Arden; or with me of sheep, poetry, and policy, the fit furnishing of an old hall, or a great feast for Christmas Day."

"He knew his men belike," said the woodman, with a cynical smile.

"Perhaps he did," replied the young lord, somewhat sternly, "and might be sure that, if he betrayed my friend in my company, I would cut his throat without waiting for royal permission, though he had all the kings in Christendom for his patrons."

"That might have a share in his discretion, it is true," answered the woodman; "but we must not have him hear our counsels now, and must make sure that he and his, as well as your own people, have ridden on."

"How can we learn that?" demanded Chartley.

"We shall hear anon," answered the wood-

man; and in a minute or two after, the door opened, and a man in a forester's garb, put in a round head covered with curly hair, demanding—

"What would you, master Boyd?"

"How goes all above?" demanded the woodman.

"All well," answered the forester.

"Upon the road," said Boyd; "upon the Hinckley road?"

"The company from the abbey just passed, all but three," replied the man. "One rode away first, and took the Coleshill road, so Tim Harris says. The other followed five minutes after, and came hither."

"Who was the third?" asked Lord Chartley eagerly.

The man did not answer for a moment, but, looked to the woodman, who nodded his head, and then the other replied—

"'Twas the tawny Moor. He is up the road there, within sight of the door."

"Let him rest, let him rest," said the woodman. "Can you trust him, my good lord?"

"Better than I could trust a king, a minister, or a lover," replied Chartley. "If ever there was true faith, out of a big dog, it lies under that brown skin."

"To Coleshill?" said the woodman, musing and turning round the horn in his hand, as if he were examining it curiously. "Ten miles by the nearest way. We shall hear more soon, but not for three hours I wot. Go along Dick, and get two or three more upon the Coleshill road, about half a mile or so from the abbey. Set one up in a tree; and if he sees a band of men coming down, let him sound three notes upon his horn, over and over, till he is answered. You, yourself, as soon as you hear the sound, run down to the abbey, and make St. Clare's baby call out aloud. Tell the portress to let the lady abbess know there are enemies coming near, and that she had better take counsel immediately. Then draw altogether here, as many men as

you can get, for we may have work to do. Away with you! And now, my good lord," he continued, as the man shut the door, "I must have my supper, and if you like to share it, you shall have woodman's fare."

"I have supped already," replied Lord Chartley; "and methinks you eat late for a forester. They are always ready enough for their meals."

"I am ready enough for mine," replied the woodman, "seeing that no morsel has passed my lips this day. I never touch food, of any kind, till midnight is near at hand. I am like a hunting dog, which, to do its work well, should have but one meal a day."

"Your habits are somewhat strange, for a man of your condition," said Lord Chartley, "and your language also."

"Oh," said the woodman, "as for my language, I have seen courts, and am courtly. Why, I was for several years a lackey to a great man; but my preferment was spoiled by the jealousy of other lackeys, so, to save myself

from worse, I ran away and betook myself to the woods and wilds; but I can be as delicate and mincing as a serving maid should need be, and as full of courtesies as a queen's ape. I am like every widow of sixty, and like every parson in rusty black without a parish: I have had my sorrows and seen my best days, which makes me at times melancholic; but I haven't forgot my gentility, when it suits my turn, nor the choice words which one perfunctorily gathers up in courts."

All this was said in a bitter and sneering manner, as if he made a mockery of the very acquirements he boasted of; and Lord Chartley replied: "By my faith, I believe your last trade is honester than your first, my good friend. However, get your supper, and tell me in the mean while, in plain English, what you think all this will come to."

The woodman took down a large bowl from a shelf on the one side of the room, and poured a part of the milk that it contained into an iron pot. This he suspended over the fire, by a

hook which hung dangling over the blaze, and when the milk began to boil, scattered a handful of oatmeal in it, stirring it round at the same time, till it was of a tolerable thick consistency. Upon this mess, when he had removed it from the fire and placed it on the table, he poured the rest of the milk cold. But, it must not be supposed, that all this time he had refrained from speaking. On the contrary, in brief and broken sentences, he replied to the young nobleman's question, saying, "What will become of it? Why, simply Richard's bands will be down about the abbey in an hour or two, and will search every corner of it—or set it on fire, perchance, or any thing else that they please to do."

"They will hardly dare, I think," said Lord Chartley. "This abbey, I am told, has the privilege of sanctuary, and if King Richard has a quality on earth, on which he can justly pride himself, it is his strictness in repressing the lawless violence which has risen up in times of long and fierce contention."

"Aye, lawless violence in other men," said the woodman; "but crimes committed in our own cause, become gentle failings in the eyes of tyrants. The man who punishes a robber or assassin, rewards a murder committed on the king's behalf. Was princely Buckingham, the other day, judged by the laws or sentenced by his peers? No, no. The king's word was warrant enough for his death, and would be for the sacking of the abbey. There is but one respect which could save it. This king would fain be thought religious; and he has respected sanctuary before now—where it served the purposes of a prison as well as a refuge; but he is cunning as well as resolute; and he will find means to hide his share in the deed he profits by. Look you here now, my good lord; suppose some band of mere plunderers attacks the abbey, as was done not very long ago; then an obnoxious bishop may fall into the king's hands, without his avowing the deed."

"But, his officers would be recognised," replied Lord Chartley.

"True, if the deed were committed by regular troops under noble leaders," said the woodman; "but these bands at Coleshill are mere mercenaries, gathered together in haste, when the report first ran, that the earl of Richmond was coming over hither. Since then, the king knows not what to do with them; and there they lie, living at free quarters upon the people. These are men, easily disavowed. But it will be as I have said: of that be you assured. If the bishop is now within the abbey, it will go hard, but they will seek him there. Then, if the abbess is wise and follows counsel, she will send him forth to me, and I will provide for his safety."

"But where? But how?" demanded Lord Chartley. "This forest is not of such extent, that you could shelter him from any keen pursuit."

The woodman looked at him with a smile, and then replied: "We do not trust all its secrets to every one. They are more intricate than you imagine. There are a thousand places where he might be hid, not to mention the

old castle on the hill. It was a stronghold of the family of the Morleys, taken and sacked in the civil wars, under the fourth Harry, and the lands given over to the abbey. There is many a chamber and many a hall there, which would puzzle the keenest scented talbot of all the king's pack, to nose out a fugitive therein. You might almost as well hunt a rat through the cript of an old church, as seek for any one hiding there. That is one place; but there are a dozen others; and whither I will take him, must be decided at the time. However, rest you sure that, once out of the abbey walls, and in my charge, he is safe."

"We must trust so," replied the young nobleman; "and your goodwill and intentions, I doubt not; but fate is out of any man's keeping, my good friend, and indeed we are all in hers. However, we must do as we can, and leave the rest to God's good will, who shapes all things as seems fit unto him, and often overrules our wishes and designs for excellent purposes that we cannot foresee. While

you take your supper—a somewhat poor one for a strong man—I will go out and tell my good Arab, Ibn Ayoub, that I am safe and well. Otherwise, having marked me hither, he will stay watching near, till I or the sun come forth."

"Well bethought," answered the woodman. "'Tis strange, how faithful these heathens sometimes are. Bring him in hither, and let him stable his horse and yours in the shed behind the cottage. He will find the way there, round to the left."

CHAPTER VIII.

Let us now return within the abbey walls for a while, and see what was passing there. The departure of the guests had left behind, at least with some of the fair inmates, that sensation of vacant dulness, which usually succeeds a period of unusual gaiety, especially with those whose ordinary course of life is tranquil if not tedious.

Iola felt that the convent would seem much more cheerless than before; and, as she stood with her cousin Constance in the little private parlour of her aunt, conversing for a few mi-

nutes, before they retired to rest, upon the events of the day, her light heart could not help pouring forth its sensations, innocent and natural as they were, to her somewhat graver and more thoughtful cousin.

"Good lack, dear Constance," she said, "I wish they would not shew us such bright scenes and give us such gay moments, if they are both to be snatched away again the next minute. How heavy will the next week be, till we have forgotten all these gay feathers, and silks, and satins, and gold embroidery, and gentle speeches, and pleasant wit."

"Nay, I hope, Iola, that you did not have too many gentle speeches," replied her cousin, with a quiet smile; "for I saw somebody's head bent low, and caught the sound of words whispered rather than spoken, and perceived a little pink ear turned up to catch them all."

"Oh, my man was the most charming ever seen," answered Iola, "just fitted for my companion in a long ride through the forest, as thoughtless, as careless, as merry as myself,

who will forget me as soon as I shall forget him, and no harm done to either. What was your man like, Constance? He seemed as gruff as a large church bell, and as stern as the statue of Moses breaking the tables."

"He was well enough for a man," answered Constance. "He might have been younger, and he might have been gentler in words; for his hair was grizzled gray, and he abused everybody roundly, from the king on his throne to the horseboy who saddled his beast. He was a gentleman notwithstanding, and courteous to me; and I have a strong fancy, dear Iola, that his heart is not as hard as his words, for I have read in some old book that hard sayings often go with soft doings."

"Ha, ha, say you so, Constance dear?" replied Iola; "then methinks, you have been prying a little closely into the bosom of this Sir William Arden. Well you are free, and can love where you list. I am like a poor popinjay tied to a stake, where every boy archer may bend his bow at me, and I do nothing but sit still and endure.

I often wonder what this Lord Fulmer is like, my husband that is to be, God wot. I hope he is not a sour man with a black beard, and that he does not squint, and has not a high shoulder like the king, and has both his eyes of one colour; for I hate a wall-eyed horse, and it would be worse in a husband—unless one of them was blind, which would indeed be a comfort, as one could be sure of getting on the blind side of him."

"How your little tongue runs," said her cousin. "It is like a lap dog fresh let out into the fields, galloping hither and thither for pure idleness."

"Well I will be merry whatever happens," answered Iola gaily. "'Tis the best way of meeting fate, Constance. You may be as grave and demure as a cat before the fire, or as sad and solemn as the ivy on an old tower. I will be as light as the lark upon the wing, and as cheerful as a bough of Christmas holly, garlanding a boar's head on a high festival; and she sang with a clear, sweet voice, every note of

which was full of gladness, some scraps of an old ballad very common in those days.

"Nay, ivy, nay,
It shall not be I wis;
Let holly have the mastery,
As the custom is.

Holly stands in the hall
Fair to behold;
Ivy stands without the door
Shivering with cold.
Nay, ivy, nay, &c.

Holly and his merry men
They dance and play;
Ivy and her maidens
Weep a well a day.
Nay, ivy, nay, &c.

Holly hath berries
As red as any rose;
The forester and hunter
Keep them for the does.
Nay, ivy, nay, &c.

Ivy hath berries
As black as any sloe;
There comes the owl,
With his long whoop of woe.
Nay, ivy, nay, &c.

In the meanwhile, the abbess herself had not been without occupation, for although the night was waning fast, the usual hour of rest long past, and the nuns in general retired to their cells, yet before she went to her own snug little room, the worthy lady saw, one after the other, several of the officers of the abbey in the great parlour. In dealing with these various personages, the worthy lady, notwithstanding her little knowledge of the world, showed a good deal of skill and diplomatic shrewdness. Her situation indeed was somewhat delicate; for she had to prepare against events, which she could not clearly explain to those with whom she spoke, and to give orders which would naturally excite surprise, without such explanation. She had prepared her story however beforehand; and she proceeded in a different manner with each of the different officers, as her knowledge of their several characters pointed out to her the most judicious course. To the porter of the great hall, a stout old man, who had been a soldier and had seen service, she

said boldly, and at once; "Leave the lodging in charge of your boy, Giles, and go down directly through the hamlet, to all the tenants and socmen within a mile. Tell them there is danger abroad, and that they must be ready, with their arms, to come up the instant they hear the great bell ring. Bid them send out some lads to the vassals who live farther off, with the same news. Then come back hither for we shall want you."

The man departed without a word, his answer being merely a low inclination of the head. The bailiff, who by right should have presented himself before the porter, but who had been impeded by the appropriation of sundry good things left from the supper table, appeared amongst the last. To him the abbess put on a very different countenance.

"Well, master bailiff," she said, with a light and cheerful smile, "have you heard anything of the bands at Coleshill?"

"Sad work, lady, sad work," replied the bailiff, casting his eyes up to heaven. "Why

I understand that, last night, some of them stole Joseph Saxton's best cow, and cut it up before his face, hardly taking the hide off."

"That shows they were very hungry," said the abbess laughing.

"Aye, lady," rejoined the bailiff, "these are not jesting matters I can tell you. Why I should not wonder if they drove some of the abbey lands before long; and we have not cattle to spare that I know of. There is no knowing what such hell kites may do."

"That's very true," answered the abbess; "and so my son, I think it will be better for you to sleep in the lodge for two or three nights; for we might want you on an occasion."

"Oh there is no fear of their coming as far as this," answered the bailiff, who had no fondness for putting his head into any dangerous position.

"Nevertheless, I desire you to remain," answered the abbess; "'tis well to have somebody to take counsel with in time of need."

"Why there is the friar, lady mother," re-

plied the bailiff, still reluctant, "the friar, whom these young lords who were here left behind in the stranger's lodging. He would give you counsel and assistance."

"Aye, ghostly counsel and spiritual assistance," replied the abbess; "but that is not what I want just now, good friend; so you will stop as I said, and remember that I shall expect a bolder face this time, if anything should happen, than when the rovers were here before. Men fancied you were afraid.—However, send the friar to me now, if he be well enough to come. I will see what counsel I can get from him."

"Well enough," cried the bailiff. "He is well enough I warrant—nothing the matter with him. Why he was walking up and down in the great court before the chapel, with his hood thrown back, and his bald crown glistening in the moonlight, like a coot in a water meadow."

Part of this speech was spoken aloud, part of it muttered to himself as he was quitting the

room in a very sullen mood. He did not dare to disobey the orders he had received, for the good abbess was not one to suffer her commands to be slighted; and yet women never, or very rarely, gain the same respect with inferiors that men obtain; and the bailiff ventured to grumble with her, though he would have bowed down and obeyed in silence, had his orders come from one of the sterner sex.

However that might be, hardly three minutes elapsed before the friar entered the parlour, and carefully closed the door behind him. His conference with the abbess was long, continuing nearly an hour, and the last words spoken were "Remember rightly, reverend father: the moment the bell sounds, betake yourself to the chapel, and stand near the high altar. You can see your way; for there is always a lamp burning in the chapel of St. Clare. Lock the great door after you; and I will come to you from our own gallery."

The bishop bowed his head and departed; and the abbess, weary with the fatigue and ex-

citement of the day, gladly sought repose. All the convent was quiet around, and the nuns long gone to rest. Even the lady's two nieces had some time before closed their eyes in the sweet and happy slumber of youth.

Sleep soon visited the pillow of the abbess also; for she never remembered having sat up so late, except once, when king Edward, the libidinous predecessor of the reigning monarch, had visited the abbey during one of his progresses.

Still and deep was her rest: she knew nothing of the passing hours: she heard not the clock strike, though the tower on which it stood was exactly opposite to her cell. She heard not even the baby of St. Clare, when, a a little before two o'clock, it was rung sharply and repeatedly. A few minutes after, however, there was a knock at the room door; but, no answer being given, a lay sister entered with a lamp in her hand, and roused her superior somewhat suddenly.

"Pardon, lady mother, pardon," she said;

" but I am forced to wake you, for here is Dick the under forester come up to tell you, from Boyd the head woodman, that enemies are coming, and that you had better take counsel upon it immediately. There is no time to be lost, he says, for they are already past the Red-bridge turn, not a mile and a half off, and alack and a well-a-day we are all unprepared!"

" Not so little prepared as you think, sister Grace," replied the abbess, rising at once, and hurrying on her gown. You run to the porter and tell him to toll the great bell with all his might, opening the gate to the men of the hamlet and the tenants, but keeping fast ward against the rovers. Then away with you, as soon as you have delivered that message, up to the belfry tower. The moon must be still up—"

" She's down, she's down," cried the nun, in great alarm.

" Then light the beacon," cried the abbess. " That will give light enough to see when they come near. As soon as you perceive men marching in a band, like regular soldiers, ring

the little bell to give the porter notice; and after watching what they do for a minute or two, come and tell me.—Be steady; be careful; and do not let fright scare away your wits."

The nun hurried to obey; and in a minute after, the loud and sonorous alarm bell of the abbey was heard, shaking the air far and wide over the forest, with its dull and sullen boom.

Having delivered her message to the porter, the poor nun, with her lamp in her hand, hurried up the numberless steps of the beacon tower, trembling in every limb, notwithstanding the courageous tone of her superior. Upon the thick stone roof at the top she found an immense pile of faggots, ready laid, and mingled with pitch, and, lying at some distance, a heap of fresh wood, to be cast on as occasion required, with a large jar of oil and an iron ladle, to increase the flame as it rose up.

Fortunately, the night was as calm as sleep, and not a breath of wind crossed the heavens; otherwise the lamp would assuredly have been

blown out in the poor sister's trepidation and confusion. As it was, she had nearly let it fall into the midst of the pile, in the first attempt to light the beacon ; but the next moment the thin dry twigs, which were placed beneath, caught the fire, crackled, nearly went out again ; and then, with a quantity of dull smoke, the fire rushed up, licking the thicker wood above. The pitch ignited; the whole pile caught; and a tall column of flame, some sixteen or seventeen feet high, rose into the air, and cast a red and ominous light over the whole country round. The buildings on the little green became distinctly visible in a moment, the houses of the priests and choristers, the cottages of the peasants and the laborers ; and running her eye along the valley beyond, in the direction of Coleshill, the lay sister saw, coming through the low ground, just under the verge of the wood, a dark mass, apparently of men on horseback, at the distance of less than half a mile. At the same time, however, she beheld a sight which gave her better hope. Not only from

the cottages on the green, were men issuing forth and hurrying to the great portal of the abbey; but along the three roads which she could espy, she beheld eighteen or twenty figures, some on foot, but some on horseback, running or galloping at full speed. They were all separate and detached from each other; but the flame of the beacon flashed upon steel caps and corselets, and spear heads; and she easily judged that the tenants and vassals, warned beforehand and alarmed by the sound of the great bell, were hastening to do the military service they owed.

When she looked again in the direction of the mass she had seen on the Coleshill road, she perceived that the head of the troop had halted; and she judged rightly that, surprised by the sudden lighting of the beacon and tolling of the bell, the leaders were pausing to consult.

For a moment, a hope crossed her mind, that they would be frightened at the state of preparation which they found, and desist; but the next instant the troop began to move on again;

and remembering the orders which she had received, she rang a lesser bell which hung near the beacon, still keeping her eyes fixed upon the party advancing up the valley.

Steadily and cautiously they came on; were lost for a minute or two behind the houses of the hamlet; then reappeared upon the little green; and dividing into three troops, the one remained planted before the great gates, while the others, gliding between the cottages and the walls of the abbey, filed off the right and left, with the evident purpose of surrounding the whole building, and guarding every outlet. The poor nun, however, fancied, on the contrary, that they were gone to seek some favourable point of attack; and murmuring to herself, "The Blessed Virgin have mercy upon us, and all the saints protect us! There will never be men enough to protect all the walls," she hurried down to make her report to her superior; but the abbess was not to be found.

CHAPTER IX.

In a small cell, of size and proportion exactly similar to those of the nuns, though somewhat differently arranged and decorated, lay a very beautiful girl sound asleep. A light coif of network confined, or strove to confine, the rich glossy curling hair; but still a long ringlet struggled away from those bonds, and fell over a neck as white as ivory. The eyes, the bright, beautiful, speaking eyes, the soul's interpreters, were closed, with the long sweeping black eyelashes resting on the cheek; but still the beautiful and delicate line of the features in their

quiet loveliness, offered as fair a picture as ever met mortal sight. Stretched beyond the bed-clothes too, was the delicate hand and rounded arm, with the loop, which fastened the night-dress round the wrist, undone, and the white sleeve pushed back nearly to the elbow. One might have sworn it was the hand and arm of some marvellous statue, had it not been for the rosy tips of the delicate fingers, and one small blue vein through which the flood of young and happy life was rushing.

The dull and heavy tolling of the great bell woke her not, though the sound evidently reached her ear, and had some indistinct effect upon her mind, for the full rosy lips of her small mouth parted, showing the pearly teeth beneath; and some murmuring sounds were heard, of which the only word distinguishable was "matins."

The next instant, however, her slumber was broken, for the abbess stood beside her with a lamp in her hand, and shook her shoulder, saying, "Iola, Iola!"

The fair girl started up and gazed in her aunt's face bewildered; and then she heard the sullen tolling of the great bell, and various other sounds which told her that some unusual events were taking place.

"Quick, Iola," cried the abbess, "rise and dress yourself. I have a task for you to perform in haste, my child.—There, no care for your toilette. Leave your hair in the net. Lose not a moment; for this is a matter of life and death."

"What is it, my dear lady mother?" asked Iola, trying to gather her senses together.

"It is to convey one, whom his persecutors have followed even hither, to a place of safety," replied the abbess. "Listen, my child, and reply not. The friar you saw this night is a high and holy man, unjustly persecuted by an usurping king. That he has taken refuge here has been discovered. The abbey is menaced by a power we cannot resist. It would be searched, the sanctuary violated, and the good man torn from the altar, to imprisonment, or

perhaps death, had I not the means of conveying him beyond the walls—aye, and beyond the reach of danger. You must be his guide, Iola, for I must not reveal the secret to any of the sisters; and if Constance is to take the veil as has been proposed, she must not know it either."

"Constance will not take the veil, dear aunt," replied Iola quietly; "but I am quite ready to do whatever you will, and to help to the utmost of my power. But cannot the good man find the way himself if he be told, for I am as ignorant of it as he is?"

"He could find his way through the passage," replied the abbess, "easily enough, but not through the wood when he issues forth."

"Oh I can guide him there, as well as Boyd's great hound Ban," answered the gay girl, "but where am I to take him, dear aunt?"

"First to the cell of St. Magdalene," answered the elder lady, "and thence by the wood walks to Boyd's cottage. If you push the door that closes the end of the passage

strongly, you will find that it opens one of the pannels at the back of the shrine. Mind you leave it ajar; however, till you come back; for once closed, you will not be able to open it from that side. Then keep down the wood-road to the east, and most likely you will meet Boyd; for he will be watching. If not, go straight on to his house, and then return at once. I will let you into the chapel as soon as the men are gone.—Now, child, are you ready?"

"One moment, dear aunt, one moment," answered Iola. "Where is my hood?—I cannot clasp this gorget."

"Let me try," cried the abbess; but her trembling hands would not perform the work; and at last Iola succeeded herself.

"There is your hood, child," cried her aunt. "Now come—come quick. We shall have them at the gates before you are gone."

Hurrying along as fast as possible, she led her fair niece through several of the long vaulted passages of the abbey, and thence, by her own private entrance, into the chapel. The door lead-

ing to the nuns' gallery was locked; but one of the keys at the abbess's girdle soon opened it; and, advancing to the grated screen, she looked down into the choir before she ventured to descend.

All was still and quiet. The glimmering light from the shrine of St. Clare afforded a view up and down the church; and no human form was to be seen. Neither was any sound heard, except the swinging of the great bell, as it continued to pour forth its loud vibrating call for assistance over the whole country round. Through the richly ornamented windows, however, came flitting gleams of many coloured light, as lanterns and torches were carried across the court, between the chapel and the portal; and once or twice the sounds of voices were heard; but the abbess distinguished the tongue of the porter, speaking with the peasants as they hurried in.

"I cannot see him," whispered the abbess, after looking down for a moment or two into the body of the church. "There can be surely no mistake."

Iola took a step forward, and put her face to the grate. "He may be behind that pillar," she said. "Yes, don't you see, dear aunt? The light from the shrine casts the shadow of something like a man upon the pavement?"

"Let us go down, let us go down," answered the abbess. "If he be not there, nobody else is, so we need not be afraid;" and, opening the door, leading to the lower part of the chapel, she descended the spiral staircase which was concealed in one of the large columns that supported both the roof of the building, and the gallery in which they had been standing. The light foot of Iola made little sound upon the pavement of the nave, as they proceeded towards the high altar; but the less elastic tread of the abbess in her flat-soled sandal, soon called from behind the pillar, a figure in a friar's gown and cowl.

In a calm and not ungraceful attitude, the old man waited for their coming; and when the light of the abbess's lamp shone upon his face, it displayed no signs of fear or agitation. "I have

locked the door, sister," he said, "as you desired me; but I almost feared I had made some mistake, when I found you did not come; for I have been here from the moment the bell began to toll."

"I had to wake my niece to guide you, reverend and dear lord," replied the abbess; "but now let us hasten; for no time is to be lost. I am terrified for your safety. To stay were ruin, and there is even peril in flight."

"There was as much in the flight from Brecknock," answered the bishop calmly; "but I am ready, my sister: lead the way.—And so you are to be my guide, my fair child?" he continued, as they followed the abbess. "Are you not frightened?"

"No, father," answered Iola quietly. "God will, I trust, protect me; and I think there is more danger here than in the forest."

By this time they had passed round the great altar, and through a door in the screen, which separated the choir from the lady chapel behind. Immediately facing them was a large sort of flat pilaster, covered half way up, as

was all that part of the building, with old oak pannelling, in many places ornamented with rude sculptures. By a very simple contrivance, the pannelling, with which the pilaster was covered, was made to revolve upon hinges, concealed in the angle, where it joined the wall. The abbess found some difficulty indeed, amongst all the heads of dragons, and monkeys, and cherubims, and devils, with which the woodwork was richly but grotesquely ornamented, to discover that which served as a sort of handle. When she had found it, however, the whole of the lower part of the pannelling moved back easily enough, and a door was seen behind on the face of the pilaster. It was low and narrow, suffering only one person to pass at once, and that with a bowed head. It was locked also at the moment; but the abbess took the key from her girdle; and the bishop opened the door easily with his own hands.

"And now, father, God speed you on your way," cried the abbess, "for I must go no further. There is the beacon bell ringing, which shows that these knaves are in sight. Here,

take the lamp with you, Iola. The passage is long and dark."

"Heaven's benison be upon you, sister," said the bishop, "and may God protect you from all evil consequences of your Christian charity towards me. Well have you repaid the little kindness I once showed your brother in times long past, and leave me a debt of gratitude besides."

"Nay, nay, I beseech you be quick, dear lord," said the lady; and passing through the doorway, the prelate and his fair guide, found themselves in a small vaulted chamber, with the end of a long, dark passage open before them. As soon as they had entered, the door was closed, and they could hear the screen of pannelling which covered it, roll back into its place. Iola led the way on through the passage before them; and the bishop, after gazing round the vaulted room for an instant, followed with a slower step and in silence. At the end of some fifteen or sixteen yards, a small descending flight of stairs presented itself; and

Iola ran lightly down holding the lamp at the bottom, till the bishop descended. He gazed on her beautiful face and figure with a fatherly smile, as, lifting the lamp above her head, she stood with the light falling on her fair forehead and graceful limbs.

"And so thy name is Iola, my fair daughter," said the bishop when he reached her side; "and thou art the niece of our good sister the abbess. Which of her brothers is thy father?"

"She has but one still living, my lord," replied Iola. "My father is no more."

"Then you must be the daughter of Richard St. Leger Lord Calverly," said the bishop, "I knew him well."

"The same, my lord," replied Iola; "and, methinks I have heard that your lordship once saved his life. If I understood my aunt's words rightly but now, and you are the Lord Bishop of Ely, I have heard my uncle, the present Lord Calverly, say that the Bishop of Ely had saved his brother's life, what time the red rose was broken from the stalk."

"I was not the Bishop of Ely then, daugh-

ter, but merely Robert Morton," replied the prelate; "one of King Edward's privy council, but one who took no share in policy or party strife, and only strove to mitigate the bloody rigour of a civil war, by touching men's hearts with mercy, when the moment served. The time will come, perhaps, when men will marvel that I, who faithfully once served King Henry, should serve, when he was dead, as faithfully his great opponent; but I had pondered well the course before me, and feel my conscience clear. I asked myself how I might do most good to men of every faction and to my country; and I can boldly say, my child, that I have saved more subjects for the crown of England—good honest men too, misled by party zeal—by interposing to stay the lifted hand of vengeance, than were slain by any of the mighty nobles who took part with either side in these horrible wars. I never changed my faction, daughter, for I never had one. And now the hatred of the reigning king has pursued me, because he knew right well, that I would raise

my voice against the wrong he did his brother's children."

To a mind well versed in the world's affairs, the fact of the good bishop entering into such apologetical explanations, at such a moment, and with such a companion, would have been sufficient to shew that he did not feel quite sure his conduct was without reproach; for we always put our armour where we know we are weak. But Iola was too young and simple to suspect or to doubt; and she only looked upon him as the good and kind prelate, who in times of intestine strife, had interposed to save her father's life. Joyful then at the task imposed upon her, she walked onward by his side; and the conversation, thus begun, proceeded in a somewhat lighter tone. The bishop asked her of her state, her future, her hopes, her wishes, and seemed to forget his own perilous situation in speaking and thinking of her. He was indeed a very fearless man, not with the rash, bold, enterprising courage of some, but with that calm, tranquil abiding of results which can

never exist without high hope and confidence in God. He had his faults as all men have; but still he had many virtues, and in an age when few were religious, felt the truths of Christianity, and knew religion to consist in something more than forms.

Once, their conversation was interrupted by the sound of horses' feet, beating the ground immediately above them ; and Iola started and looked up with an expression of fear.

"They will not break through, my child," said the prelate, with a smile, lifting his eyes to the solid masonry above. "That arch is thick and strong, depend upon it; but, I suppose, by those sounds, we are already beyond the abbey walls?"

"I do not know," answered Iola, "for I have never been here before; but the lady abbess tells me, this passage will lead us out into St. Magdalen's cell, and thence, I know the way well."

"How far is it?" asked the bishop.

"Oh, a long way," answered the fair girl, by his side, "nearly a mile."

She thought only of its distance by the ordinary path, which, as I have before said, took various turnings to avoid the ravine and the rivulet; but the passage that they were now pursuing, sunk by the steps which they had descended to a level below all such obstacles, abridged the distance by nearly one half. It is true that the bottom of the bed of the rivulet itself, was somewhat lower than the top of the arched vault; but nevertheless the latter had been carried straight on and cemented, so as to be impervious to the water, while broken rocks and stones had been piled up above, concealing the masonry, and forming a little cascade in the stream. Thus, when they reached that spot, the rush and murmur of the waterfall was heard, and turning her bright eyes to the prelate's face, Iola said:

"We must be passing under the river, I think."

"It is not unlikely, daughter," replied the

bishop. "In the other lands, which you most likely have never seen, I have beheld vast structures for carrying rivers from hill to hill, raised on high arches, underneath which, the busy world of men passed to and fro, while the stream flowed overhead."

"I have heard of such things," replied Iola, "and, oh how I long to see those lands, and to dream of all that mighty men have done in former days. How strange it is, that such arts have not come down to us. Here, we see nothing between the huge castle with its frowning towers, or the lordly church with its spires and pinnacles, and the wood cottage of the peasant, or the humble abode of the franklin."

The bishop smiled at her.

"You have been but little in cities, my child," he said; "but your observation is just. It is strange that the arts of other ages have not descended to us; for one would suppose, if anything on earth could be permanent, it would be, that knowledge and that skill, which tend

to the elevation, the protection, and the comfort of the human race, especially when the wonders they have performed, and the monuments they have raised, are still before our eyes, although in ruins. But birth, life, death, and corruption are the fate of nations, as well as of men, of systems as well as creatures, of the offsprings of the human mind as well as of the inheritors of the corporeal frame. As in the successions of the human race however, we see the numbers of the population still increasing, notwithstanding periods of devastation and destruction; as those who are born and die, give birth to more than their own decease subtracts, so probably the loss of the arts, the sciences, even the energies which one nation or one epocha has produced, is succeeded by the production of arts, sciences, energies, more numerous, if not more vigorous, in the nation or epocha which follows. But these have again their childhood, their maturity, their decay; and society with us, my daughter, is perhaps still in its infancy—I believe, indeed it is."

Iola gazed at him surprised, and somewhat bewildered, for he had led her mind beyond its depth; and the good prelate read the expression aright, and replied to it—

"You are surprised at such reasonings," he said, "because you are not accustomed to them; but I believe those people above would be more surprised, if they knew, that at the very moment they are seeking me to destroy me, I am walking along calmly beneath their feet, talking philosophy with a fair young creature like yourself."

He spoke with a smile, and then cast down his eyes in a musing mood, but, still that high intelligent smile remained upon his lips, as if he found some amusement in watching the workings of his own mind, amidst the strange circumstances with which fate surrounded him.

The moment after, the passage began to ascend, not exactly by steps, though the broad, flat stones with which it was paved, rose a little, one above the edge of the other, rendering the path somewhat rough and difficult. This lasted

not long, however, and the bishop, raising his eyes, observed—

"There seems a door before us. Have you got the key?"

"It will open, on being pressed hard," replied Iola; "but I cannot think we have reached the cell yet. The way has seemed so short."

So it proved however; and approaching the door, she attempted to push it open, but it resisted her efforts. The bishop however aided; the door moved back; and holding it open, he desired Iola to pass through into the cell, which was now before them. It was a low vaulted Gothic chamber, opening on the side of the hill, by an arch with an iron grate, and having on one side a shrine and little altar. The bishop followed his fair guide into this small chapel; but Iola herself, had forgotten her aunt's injunction regarding the door. The bishop let it slip from his hand, as he passed through; and it closed at once, leaving no trace of its existence in the old woodwork of the

walls. Had Iola recollected the difficulty she might have in returning, she would certainly have been alarmed; and the sudden close of the door would probably have brought her aunt's warning to her remembrance, had not a sight been presented to her, immediately on entering the chapel, which at once occupied all her attention. Through the low archway which I mentioned, appeared the walls and towers of the abbey, lighted up by the flame of the beacon, and by a blaze, red and smoky as if proceeding from torches, both in the great courtyard between the chapel and the portal, and on the little green before the great gates. The green, itself, was partly hidden by the priest's house and the cottages; but, under the walls, to the north and west of the building, were seen several groups of men on horseback; and the sounds of loud voices speaking, and of men calling to one another, were borne to the ear distinctly, for the great bell by this time, had ceased to toll, and there was no other sound to interrupt the murmur of the voices from the abbey.

By a natural impulse, Iola clasped her fair hands together, and uttered a low exclamation of fear; but the bishop gazed calmly forth for a moment, and then said—

"We had better hasten on our way, my child. Extinguish the lamp — Here, set it down here. We must not show ourselves more than we can help, lest any eye should be turned this way."

"We must pass through the grate," said Iola, recalled to herself by the prelate's words; "for there is no other way out; but if we run quickly round to the back of the building, no one will see us."

"Let us go one at a time," said the bishop. "It is well to take every precaution, though I do not think the light is sufficiently strong to show us to those on the opposite side of the valley."

"Turn sharp to the right," said Iola, opening the iron grate, for the prelate to pass through; and, as soon as he was gone, she followed and rejoined him at the back of the building.

"Now this way, this way," she continued hastily, anxious to lead him away from dangers, the imminence of which seemed now for the first time to strike her; and guiding him along one of the forest paths, she hurried on with a quick step, saying with one of her gay, short laughs:

"They would not easily find us here. I could lead them through such a labyrinth that they would not know which way to turn, to get out."

"You seem to know the forest well, daughter," said the bishop, in a good-humoured tone. "I fear me you have been fonder of rambling in the woods, than conning dry lessons in the abbey of St. Clare."

He spoke in a gay and kindly manner, which conveyed no reproof; but Iola blushed a little while she answered—

"Surely! My dear aunt has not been very severe with me; and every day, when the sun was bright and the skies blue, I have gone out—sometimes with my girl Alice, sometimes alone,

sometimes on foot, sometimes on a mule, sometimes to bear a message to woodman or tenant, sometimes for pure idleness. And yet not pure idleness either, my lord; for I do not know why, but amidst these old trees and upon the top of the hill, where I catch a view of all the woods and fields and rivers below, bright, and beautiful and soft, it seems as if my heart rose up to Heaven more lightly than under the vault of the chapel and amongst its tall columns of stone. Then sometimes, I sit beneath a spreading oak, and look at its giant limbs and compare them with the wild anemone that grows at its foot, and lose myself in musing over the everlasting variety that I see. But hark! those voices are very loud. They cannot be coming nearer, surely."

"You are brave at a distance, daughter," said the bishop calmly, "but be not alarmed. They are only raised a little higher."

"Oh, no," she answered; "I am no coward; "and you would see, if they did come near, I should not lose my wits."

Almost as she spoke, a voice exclaimed, in a tone not very loud—

"Who goes there?" and Iola started, and laid her hand on the bishop's arm, as if to keep him back.

"It is Boyd, the woodman's voice, I think," she said in a whisper. "Slip in behind that great tree, and I will go on and see."

"Who goes there?" repeated the voice again raised higher; and Iola, taking a step or two forward, demanded—

"Who is it that asks?"

"Is that you, Lady Iola?" said the voice, as soon as the woman's tone was distinguished.

"Yes," answered Iola. "Is it Boyd who speaks?"

"The same," answered the woodman. "Have you brought him? Where is he? Is he safe?"

"He is here, he is here," answered Iola. "Father, this is Boyd the woodman, in whom you can fully trust?"

"Ah, lady, lady,'" murmured the woodman,

coming forward. "Where is the man in whom you can fully trust?"

Advancing towards him, Iola and the prelate found that he had been standing in a small open space at the angle of two roads, both of which led more or less directly to St. Magdalen's cell. The light on the spot was faint; but the woodman's tall and powerful figure was not to be mistaken; and having resigned her charge to him, Iola turned to the prelate, saying,

"Now I will go back as fast as possible, father."

"Stay a moment, my child," replied the bishop. "May the Almighty bless and protect you, and guide you in safety unto all peace;" and he laid his hand tenderly on her head.

"Do not go in rashly, lady," said the woodman, "but stay in the little vaulted chamber at the end of the passage, till you hear matins sung in the chapel. The place will not be free

of these rovers till then. If you hear not matins or prime, you may suppose that they still keep possession. In that case, you had better come away to me, dear lady—you know that I will take care of you."

"Oh, I know that well, Boyd," replied Iola. "Good night, good night—see to this reverend father's safety before all things."

"Aye that will take two good hours at least," said the woodman, "or I would go back with you myself dear lady; but I think you are safe enough alone."

"I have no fear," answered Iola; and she tripped lightly away, retreading the path back towards the cell.

That path led along the rising ground just at the verge of the forest, where the trees were thin and the undergrowth scanty, so that the sounds from the abbey continued to reach the fair girl's ears as she pursued it. She thought she heard the sound of horses' feet somewhat nearer, also, as if coming from the road that led up through the forest. At the same time

it seemed to her that a redder glare, and a broader light spread over the sky, reflected thence upon the little footway which she trod. "They must have piled more wood upon the beacon," she thought; but yet she felt some degree of alarm.

Hurrying on, she at length reached the spot where the path passed at the back of the cell, and turning quickly round the little building, the abbey, with the slight rise on which it stood, was once more before her sight. What was her terror and surprise at that moment, when she saw the beacon light extinguished, but a still wider and more fearful glare rising up from the little green, the houses surrounding which were all in flames. Several of the wooden cottages were already down, the still burning beams and rafters lying in piles upon the ground, like huge bonfires, casting up a cloud of sparks into the flickering, fiery air above; and across the glare might now be seen a number of dark figures moving about upon the green, some on horseback, some on foot.

From the house of the priests and choristers was rising up a tall spire of flame, sometimes clear and bright, sometimes obscured by a cloud of smoke and sparks; but the abbey itself was still unfired, and stood out dark and solemn in the midst of the blaze, with the light gleaming here and there upon the walls and pinnacles.

The first sight startled and horrified her; but she did not pause to gaze at it, till she had entered the chapel and closed the iron gate, as if for protection; but then she stood and watched the flames for a moment or two, and at length asked herself what she should do.

"I will go back," she answered, after a moment's thought. "I will not be absent from my poor aunt's side at such a moment;" and she turned to seek the door into the passage. Then, for the first time, she perceived that it was closed, and recollected the warning of the abbess to leave it ajar. She now felt really terrified; and that need of protection and help, that want of something to lean upon and

to trust in, which most women experience in the hour of danger, made itself terribly felt.

"What will become of me? Where shall I go? What shall I do?" she murmured anxiously; and then, again and again, cast a timid glance at the burning buildings on the opposite side of the dell. "I will go to Boyd's house," she said at length. "I can find protection there."

But suddenly she remembered what he had said, in regard to the time he should be occupied in providing for the safety of the bishop; but her determination was at length expressed—"I shall be more safe there than here at all events. I will go;" and, without further hesitation, she crept back into the path again.

Iola now knew for the first time in life, perhaps, what it is to fear, and how the imagination is excited by apprehension. The sight of the burning buildings had shaken her nerves. She crept along as stealthily as if she feared that every

tree was an enemy. She thought she heard sounds too, near at hand as she went on, and then tried to persuade herself that it was but the waving of the trees in the wind. Then she felt sure that somebody must be near; she quickened her pace to reach a path which turned suddenly to the right; but at the very entrance, when she reached it, there was standing a figure, the form of which she could not distinctly see; but it seemed tall and thin, and garmented all in white, according to the popular idea of a phantom. She recoiled in terror and would have fled back again; but there directly in her way was another figure; and a voice exclaimed, as she was turning once more to fly—

"Lady, lady, whither away? Stay yet a moment—stay it is a friend."

She thought she knew the tones; but as the stranger approached, she receded, asking—

"Who is it? Who is it?"

"It is Lord Chartley," he said. "Stay, stay! You are running upon danger."

The last words were needless; for before they were fully uttered, Iola had not only stopped but sprung forward to meet him.

CHAPTER X.

Human fate, or rather the fate of the whole human race, is but as a web of cloth fixed in the frame of circumstances, with an unseen hand continually throwing the shuttle. The threads may be infinite, and some far apart from others: some in the centre, some at the selvage, but all tied and bound together by filaments that run across and across, and never ceasing till the piece is finished. When will that be? Heaven only knows. Certainly not till the end of the world.

We must now, by the reader's permission,

leave the thread of Iola, and take up that of the abbess where we last left it.

As soon as she had closed the door and pushed to the pannelling which concealed it, the abbess reascended to the nuns' gallery in the chapel, and thence proceeded into the great body of the building. She found, as may be supposed, the utmost confusion and alarm prevailing; for by this time the noise of the great bell, and of the various sounds that were rising up around the walls, had roused all the nuns from their pallets, and with consternation in their countenances, they were hurrying hither and thither seeking something, and not knowing very well what they sought. Although a good deal alarmed herself, and unable to foresee what might be the end of all that was taking place, the abbess, whose heart was naturally merry, could almost have laughed at the grotesque accidents which fear produced; but, having more mind and character than the whole convent put together, she at once proceeded to restore order.

"Go at once to the chapel," she said to every nun she saw; "gather all the sisterhood there, and see that none be omitted. I will join you soon."

This order had to be repeated frequently; for at every step she met some one, and several required it to be reiterated two or three times, before terror would suffer them to comprehend it.

At length, passing round the end of the chapel, the abbess entered the great court, and found to her joy and satisfaction, a much greater body of men drawn up for her defence, than she expected; for the woodman had not been idle during the morning, and many more of the peasantry had been warned to listen for the sound of the bell, than the voice of the porter could summon. Four of the inferior foresters also had somehow found their way into the building, dressed in leathern coats and iron caps, and each carried on his shoulder a sort of weapon, which none within the walls had ever seen before. This was a sort of small

cannon, fastened upon a rudely constructed stock, and fitted to carry a ball of the weight of two or three ounces. There was no lock, nor any contrivance even for applying fire to the touch-hole by one movement; but round the arm of the bearer was twined a coil of match, which one of the men was as at that moment lighting at the porter's lantern.*

"What is that? What is that?" cried the abbess; "it looks like a little falconet."

"It is a hand gun, lady," said the forester. "Some of our people brought them from Burgundy; and Boyd sent in these four. When it is time to use them, we hoist them over our shoulders; and, while the men behind take aim, we fire."

* The first mention that I find of the real arquibuse, or match lock, is in an account of the household of the Duke of Burgundy in 1474; but small cannons, called in France coulverines à la main, were used long before. They are represented in the old miniatures, as resting on the shoulder of one soldier, while another takes the aim from behind, and the first applies the match at the word of command.

The abbess mused, for the invention was quite new to her; and, strangely clumsy as it was, it seemed to her, a wonderful discovery in the art of war. She even grew very valiant on the strength of it, and called aloud for the bailiff, to consult with him upon the means of defence. The bailiff could not be found, however; and the porter informed her, with a grin, that he had gone to the buttery, thinking that there must be the principal point of attack.

"Bring him hither directly," said the abbess; "bring him by the ears, if he will not otherwise come.—In the mean time how many men have we here?"

"Three and thirty, my lady," replied the old porter, while one or two ran away to bring the bailiff; "three and thirty, besides the gun men. I think we can make good the place till morning; and then we shall have the whole country up to help us. But if you would take my advice, you would lock that bailiff up in a cell. He cools men's hearts with his cowardice. I wish he were half as brave as you, my lady."

"Well then you must command, porter," said the abbess. "Let some of the men take their bows and cross bows up to the top of the portal, while others keep watch upon the walls all round, that they may not raise ladders without our knowing it. Let the four men with the hand cannons draw up across the chapel door for the present. They can there very well fire upon the gates, if the enemy should break them down."

The porter was venturing to remonstrate, pointing out that the gun men would be better on the walls, when the unfortunate bailiff was dragged into the abbess's presence, with a face so pale and eyes so haggard, that his very look convicted him. He smelt strongly of wine too, so that it was clear, he had been seeking to gain courage from other sources than his own heart.

"Coward!" cried the abbess, as soon as she saw him, "are you not ashamed to see women set you an example in defending the rights of the church, while you are slinking away from

your duty? Take him hence;" she continued, as he attempted to stutter forth some vain excuses. "Take him hence at once, and lock him up in the first cell on the left hand.—Away with him, for fear his cowardice should become infectious!—Hark! They are upon the green. There is a trumpet. I will go up to the window above the gates, and speak with them. Let not the men shoot till I give the word."

Two or three of the people round besought her to forbear, especially the priest and the principal chorister; but the abbess not only persisted in her resolution, but besought them to accompany her, in a tone which did not admit of refusal; and, walking on with an air of more dignity than one would have supposed her little plump figure could display, she ascended the stairs in the left hand tower of the portal, and presented herself at the grated window just above the gates. The part of the green nearest to the abbey, was now covered with armed men, principally on horseback, though some had dismounted and were approaching the gates.

A group of six or seven, who were apparently leaders, were seen at a little distance on the left, and one of them was at that moment raising his voice to an armed peasant who had appeared upon the walls. The abbess, however, cut short this oratory in the commencement, by demanding, in that shrill high key which makes itself heard so much farther than even a louder voice at a lower note: "What want ye here, my masters? How come you here in arms before the abbey of St. Clare? Bid those men keep back from the gates! Else I will bid the soldiers shoot and the cannon fire."

"Cannons!" cried one of the leaders with a laugh. "By my fay, the place seems a fortress instead of an abbey."

"You will find it so to your cost, uncivil churl, if you attempt to plunder here," cried the abbess. "Bid them keep back I say, or bide the consequence!"

"Halt, there, keep back!" cried the leader who had before spoken; and pushing his own horse under the window where the abbess stood,

he looked up saying, "They were but going to ring the bell. Are you the lady abbess?"

"What need of six men to ring the bell?" exclaimed the abbess. "If you need so many hands to do small work, you will require more than you have brought here to get the gates open. I am the lady abbess, and I bid you go hence and leave me and my children at peace, upon pain of anathema, and the greater and the lesser excommunication. I know not whether ye be the same who came to plunder us some time ago; but, if ye be, ye will find us better prepared now, than we were then, though it cost you dear, even at that time."

"Listen, listen, good lady," said the horseman; "for, if you do not hear, you cannot understand, and a woman's tongue is sometimes worse than a cannon."

"You will find the thunder of the church worse still," cried the lady.

"Of that we are not afraid," answered the other; "for we come not to plunder, or commit any act of violence, unless we are driven to it."

"Pardieu, this is all chattering and nonsense," cried another man, who had ridden up from behind. "Break open the gates, Sir John. If you do not, I will; for they will convey the man away, and by Heaven, if they do, I will burn the place about their ears!"

"Peace, peace!" cried the other. "They cannot convey him away. Our men are all round the walls. Listen to me for a moment, lady. We have certain information, that a man took refuge here last night, disguised as a friar. Him, we must have forth; and if you will bring him out and give him up, we will ride away quietly and leave you. If not, we must find our way in and take him. We should be sorry to hurt any of your people, or to do any damage; but, when a place is forced, you know, soldiers are under no command, and the consequence be upon your own head. We must have him out."

"Do you not know that this is sanctuary," cried the abbess, "and even if he had committed

paricide or treason, any man would be safe within these walls."

"Aye, but he has not committed any offence which makes sanctuary available," replied the other. "This is a deserter from his right standard, and we will have him forth, sanctuary or no sanctuary."

"There is no such man within the walls of St. Clare," replied the abbess. "I only stand up for the privileges of the place, because they are its privileges; but at the same time, I tell you that there is no sanctuary man here, of any kind or description whatever."

"Hell and damnation!" exclaimed the more vehement of the leaders. "Will you pretend to tell me that a man did not come here this very evening, habited as a friar, who never went forth again with those who brought him?—On upon the gates there. This is all jugglery!"

"Hold yet a moment, ere it comes to strife," exclaimed the abbess; and the other leader also exclaimed :

"Hold, hold there! What would you say, lady? for we cannot be dallied with."

"I say," replied the abbess, "that the damnation you evoke will some day fall upon your own heads, if you pursue this course. Moreover, I tell you, that there is no such man here, nor any man at all, but the tenants and officers of the abbey. A friar certainly did come here this evening, with a goodly company of guests. He did *not* depart with them; but, he went away afterwards, and is no longer here—Hear me out! To save bloodshed, I will give you the means of satisfying yourselves, protesting at the same time, against the act you commit, and clearly reserving my right to punish you for it, at an after time, when you shall not plead my permission as an excuse."

"We will look to that," cried one of the others boldly. "Open your gates. We shall not want excuses for anything we do."

"Nay!" answered the abbess. "I open not my gates to all your lewd band. Any six may enter, if they will, and search every corner of

the abbey, from one end to the other. You will then soon see, that I have means of defence if I choose to exert them. If you accept the terms, bid all the rest of the men retire to the other side of the green. If not, I will tell the cross-bow men and cannoniers to fire."

"We must have ten with us; otherwise we shall never get through the search," said the leader, who had first spoken.

"Well, ten be it then," said the abbess. "We shall only have more in our hands, to hang, if those without attempt to play us any treachery."

"You are merry, lady," said the leader. "Is it so agreed?"

"Yes!" replied the abbess; "bid your men back, quite to the other side. Then let ten advance, and I will come down and order them to be admitted."

She waited till she had seen the retreat of the band, to the far part of the green; and then descending, she gave her orders with great clearness and rapidity, directing such arrange-

ments to be made, as would display her little force to the greatest advantage, and ordering her porter as the commander-in-chief, to send two or three stout men with each party of the searchers, keeping a wary eye at the same time upon the band without, to insure they did not approach nearer to the gates.

She then retired into the chapel, where she found the nuns all gathered round the great altar, like a swarm of bees. Having quieted and re-assured them, as well as she could, she betook herself to the window, which gave light to the gallery appropriated to the sisterhood, and, opening the lattice, looked out into the court. By this time, the ten men to whom she had promised admittance, were entering, one by one, through the wicket; and she flattered herself that their faces, seen by the light of the torches, showed some surprise at the numbers collected for the defence of the place. The first part of the building however, which they chose to search, was the chapel, and hurrying down, she met them at the great altar in the midst of her

nuns. No incivility was committed; for the men without, with their loaded hand guns, and some fifteen or sixteen others, with steel cross-bows in their hands, had imposed a salutary reverence upon the intruders. The chapel however, was searched in every part; and when this was done, the soldiers gone, and the door once more locked, the abbess again resumed her station at the window, with a heart, which notwithstanding her bold exterior, beat somewhat anxiously for the departure of the band.

She saw the buildings on either side of the court examined thoroughly; and then, dividing into three parties, the searchers proceeded on their way, disappearing from her sight. She listened for their voices as they went, and could trace them part of the way round the great quadrangle; but then, all was silent again, and she judged that they had gone to the most remote parts of the building—perhaps even to the gardens—to sweep it all the way up, in order to prevent the possibility of a fugitive escaping.

All was silent for some minutes, except the

low murmurs of the abbey-men speaking in the court below ; but then came some sounds which startled and alarmed the abbess ; for, after a crash, as of a door forced open, she could distinctly hear a shout of, " Here he is, here he is ! We've got him."

A loud murmuring of many tongues succeeded ; and in a state of trembling anxiety, she waited for the result, till, to her great relief and even amusement, she beheld the whole party of ten re-appear, dragging along her cowardly bailiff in the midst of them, while several of the retainers of the abbey, followed with a look of malicious fun upon their faces.

" Upon my life. Upon my soul. By all the blessed saints, I tell you true," cried the unhappy bailiff. " Here, Giles, porter, tell them who I am, man—He can tell you—he can tell you."

" Faith, you are mistaken there, if you call me porter," said the man he addressed. " I know nothing about you. You are mistaken in me, good sir. I am the bailiff of the abbey."

"There, there," said one of the leaders of the soldiery. "It is all in vain, my good lord, so come along—There take him out."

The abbess could not refrain from laughing, although she felt a strong inclination to interfere, and claim the poor bailiff as the especial property of the convent. Before she could make up her mind, however, the man was past the gates; but still, while one party of the searchers remained in the court, another turned back and pursued the examination, till not a hole or corner of the abbey was left unexplored.

In the meanwhile, however, a great deal of loud cursing and swearing was heard from the green; words of command were given, orders shouted forth; and at length, the porter hurriedly closed the wicket, exclaiming—

"Up to the walls! Bend your cross-bows! What are they about now?—You gunners stand here below!—You pass not, sir, you pass not, till we know what all this is," he continued, addressing the leader who had first spoken to the abbess, and who, with three com-

panions, now hurried into the court from the more secluded part of the building.

"I know not what it is any more than you do, my good man," replied the other; "but if you let me out, I will soon see."

"They are coming forward towards the gates, sir!" exclaimed the porter. "Shoot at them if they come too close, my men!—You are a knight, sir, it seems; and we will keep you as a hostage for the safety of the abbey."

"Nay, I cannot be answerable for that unless you let me forth," replied the other; "but if you do, I pledge my knightly word, as a gentleman and a Christian, that all the troops shall be drawn off, and the abbey left unmolested."

He spoke eagerly and hastily, evidently under some alarm; but the old porter was not satisfied, and he replied—

"Here put it down and your name to it. Here are pen and ink, and the visitor's book in the lodge. The officer hurried in, and did as was required at once; for the four unpleasant

looking hand culverins were pointed at him and his companions, and a lighted match in each man's hand ready to discharge them.

"There it is," he said, when he had written. "Now let me pass."

The porter looked over the writing. Whether he could read or not, I cannot tell; but when he had satisfied himself as far as he was able, he cautiously opened the wicket, and let the intruders pass out one by one.

The commander led the way, hurrying on with a quick step; and he certainly did not arrive as soon as he could have wished.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed. "What is the matter?"

"Mort Dieu!" cried the second in command, "we have been cheated, Sir John. This man is not the bishop after all. Here is one of our own people who knows him, and says he is really the bailiff."

"I am indeed," cried the miserable coward; "and if you would have let me, I would have told you all long ago."

"He says, the friar was there not an hour ago," vociferated the second in command, "and that they must have got him out, either into these houses, or into the wood, as we were coming up the valley."

"Search the houses," said the commander; "and send a troop up the road to the wood."

"It is done, it is done," cried the other. "The men are furious; for they will lose all share of the reward.—By Satan and all his imps," he added, "I believe they have set fire to the houses."

"This will come to a serious reckoning," said the commander gravely. "Try and stop the fire there. Call off the men;" and as promptly as might be, he did all that was possible to remedy the evil that had been done. As every one who has had the command of rude men must know, however, there are times when they become perfectly ungovernable. Such was the case at present. They were an irregular and ruthless body who now surrounded the abbey;

and without attending to the orders they received, to the remonstrances or even to the threats of their commander, they set fire to every building on the right hand side of the green. Nor would the others have escaped the same fate; nor the abbey itself have been left unassailed, had not the officer, as a last resource, commanded the trumpets to sound, and ordered all who could be gathered together to march up the road, for the purpose of searching the forest.

The stragglers followed, as soon as they found that the principal part of the troop had left them; and the whole force, except three or four, who remained to complete the pillage of the priest's house, marched slowly up, till a halt was sounded under the first trees of the wood.

There, however, the officer in command selected some twenty men from his band, and rode back to the abbey green. The rest of the men halted where they stood, inquiring of each other what could be the meaning of this proceeding.

He gave no explanation even when he returned; but the next morning, at daybreak, three bodies were found hanging by the neck from poles stuck into the thatch of one of the unconsumed cottages.

CHAPTER XI.

"Oh, I am very glad!" exclaimed Iola, in a tone so confiding, so joyful, that it made Chartley's heart thrill.

There is certainly something in trust and confidence that is wonderfully winning. Even with man—fierce, bloody, all-devouring man—it is hardly possible to resist sacred confidence. The birds, the beasts which trust us, and shew their trust by cheerful familiarity, we spare and cherish. The robin hops upon the window sill, and we feed it with the crumbs from our table; and—to go from the least to the greatest—we are told, that if we too trust in God, He will feed us, as we feed the bird.

Yes, there is something very winning in confidence; and Lord Chartley, though he could not see the fair face of Iola distinctly, thought her more beautiful at that moment, than when she had been sitting by his side at the abbey.

"Dear lady," he said, taking her hand and speaking in a low voice, "it rejoices me that you are glad; and right glad am I too, believe me, to find you, though I did not rightly expect it. I have seen our friend the woodman but now, and him whom you wot of. They are safely across the road; but I could not be satisfied, when I heard that you had gone back alone, without following you, to assure myself of your safety. Why did you—"

"But who is that—who is that up there?" demanded Iola, pointing with her left hand, in the direction of the spot where she had seen another figure standing, but not withdrawing her right from that of the young nobleman, and, on the contrary, creeping closer to him.

"Fear not," replied Chartley; "it is only my good slave. I stationed him there, to warn you there was danger on that path, while I crept through the trees, to see you safely to the cell. Why did you turn back? Are you afraid to go through the passage alone?"

"No, no," she answered; "but, alas, the door is closed, and cannot be opened from this side."

"Unfortunate indeed!" exclaimed Lord Chartley. "What is to be done now?—Where are you to pass the night?"

"Oh," replied Iola, in a frank cheerful tone, "I fear not now when you are with me. I will go at once to the good woodman's cottage, if you will but kindly take care of me till I reach it. I shall be quite safe there."

"It would be indeed a pleasant task," replied her young companion; "but it is impossible, either for you or me, dear lady, to reach the cottage without danger, to which you must not be exposed. There is already one troop of these men upon the road; and if I judge rightly

by the trumpet I heard just now, others will soon follow. It would seem that they have discovered our good friend's escape, and are pursuing him hither. Besides, the woodman will not be at his dwelling for several hours. I saw him across the road, just before the head of the troop came up the hill; and then, after watching for a moment, and perceiving that they sent parties forward, as if to patrol, I came on hither, fearful for you."

"You are very kind," said Iola, in a low and sweet, but sad tone. "What I am to do now, I know not. I must pass the night in the wood, I fancy, like the poor children that they tell of. Would that I had brought warmer garments; for in truth it is not warm; and what between fear and cold, I am shaking already.—What will become of me, I wonder?"

"Nay, the cold shall be soon remedied," answered the young nobleman. "This furred surcoat could not serve a fairer purpose or a fairer maid, though in truth it might hold two such slight fairy forms as this.—Nay, I insist

upon it," he continued, as he wrapped the warm garment round her; "and as for fear, dear lady, tremble not for that. I will defend you with my life, and will not part with you, till I see you safely back within the walls of the abbey, or at least under your good aunt's protection. Besides, I have strong help at need, in the strength of my good Arab's arm. Woe be to the rover who meets the edge of his scimitar. Nevertheless, we must find out some place of refuge for the night, if it be but a bower of green boughs, where you can sleep while I guard you as your sentinel."

"It were better to seek some more secure hiding-place," answered Iola, "where these people will not find us. There is what they call Prince Edward's cave, I know not why; but that is on the other side of the road."

"The woodman spoke of an old castle on the hill," said the young nobleman. "I saw the keep too, towering up from below; but now, I cannot tell which way it lies."

"Oh, I can find the way," cried Iola gladly.

"I know every path thither, and almost every stone in the building. It lies on this side of the hill too, though it is more than a mile off."

"Then let us thither if you can find the way," replied Chartley. "Should we be pursued, we can play at hide and seek there; or at the worst, make good some tower or staircase till help comes. Were I sure that there is any officer or man of repute with these bands, I should not fear for you; but so fair a flower must not be trusted in the rude hands of lawless soldiery."

Iola did not, or would not, notice the last words. Indeed, it is rare, when a phrase contains several parts, that more than one is attended to by any individual. She fixed at once upon what he had said regarding the old castle, and answered, "Oh, we can play at hide and seek with them there, for a year, if we can but reach it safely; and I think I can lead you thither by a path they will never dream of; for still, while approaching, it seems to be turning away from the object at which it aims."

"Somewhat like woman's wit, dear lady," answered Lord Chartley, laughing, "Which I must say often takes the prettiest ways imaginable to its ends, in gay meanderings round and round. But come. There is no fear of their attempting to search the wood, this night at least, though they may try to watch all the outlets. We shall pass safe enough, if we enter upon no high roads."

"No, no," answered Iola, with a little spice of vengeance. "They shall be all crooked, narrow, and obscure, like man's policy. Here, we must turn up here, and take up your Moor by the way."

"Lean upon my arm then," said Chartley, drawing hers through his own. "You will need some support on this long journey."

"It will be like the journey of life," she answered, "where sometimes we must tread the narrow path singly and unsupported; sometimes guiding and helping each other."

Thus saying, she walked on with him leaning lightly on his arm, but musing as she went.

Chartley spoke a few words to Ibn Ayoub, bidding him follow a few steps behind, and keep a watchful ear for any sounds of pursuit; and thus he and his fair companion proceeded for about five minutes in silence, till at length Iola, broke from her fit of musing, saying abruptly, "Heaven help me! What would my poor aunt think if she knew that I was wandering here alone with you, my lord."

Lord Chartley thought he perceived in those words a certain portion of doubt and fear, which he could not but own was natural, but yet he was very anxious to remove. "I trust she would be glad," he replied, "that you had met with one, by a strange accident, in whom you and she can fully trust, to guard and defend you against all wrong. I think you know that such a one is by your side."

"Oh that I do," she answered, looking up towards his face, though she could not see it. "Do not suppose I have any fears of you, my lord; for I feel as if I had known you many a year; and, though they say we should judge

no man rashly, yet I am right sure you would neither wrong me nor see me wronged, for any good the world could give. My aunt, however, might be more suspicious; for she has strange notions of the world, and I trust not true ones."

Chartley was silent for a moment or two, and then laughed gaily.

"It were easy," he replied at length, "to say as I was just going to say—Trust me, and doubt all other men; but I had better say nothing of the kind however, for I can neither tell you rightly why you should suspect others, nor give you a good reason why you should trust me. Happy is it, in my case, that you have no choice. Trust me you must, sweet girl, whether you will or not; but believe me," he added, thinking he felt a certain tendency to withdraw her arm from his, "believe me, that trust is not misplaced and never will be. So now I will make no more professions. There is another blast of the trumpet; but it is farther off than before."

"It comes down the hill," answered Iola. "They have got farther on than we have; but yet we shall beat them, I trust; for the many are ever outwitted by the few I hear. Though good sooth I know nothing of life, and but repeat such sage sayings as an old nurse's songs, without being sure if they be to the right tune or not—Oh prudery," she continued gaily, "what would the dear nuns, and sister Bridget especially, say, if they could hear me thus chattering with a young lord, in a dark wood, when there is so much sad and sober earnest going on near?—You too, perhaps, think it strange; but I have had so little practice in concealing what I think, that my foolishness ever rushes to my lips before my slow wit can start forth to stop it."

"Nay, I think no such thing," replied Lord Chartley, "for by my faith, the case is much the same with me. Besides, did we not make a bargain at supper time, that the casket was not to be closed, but all the jewels of the heart were to be left unveiled?"

"True," she answered. "It was a rash pro-

mise; but like all promises, I suppose, it must be kept; and indeed, had it not been made, I am afraid the course would have been the same; for the key of that casket which you talk of is seldom to be found when needed; and the lock is somewhat rusty, from being left always open.—Think not, however, I would act or speak thus to all men, for had you, as did the only young man I ever saw twice before yourself, talked of my beautiful eyes or my charming fingers—or even, like the friend who was with you, had you thrown out a pretty neat turned compliment upon bright and beautiful looks, to be picked up by any one who thought it worth the stooping for, I should have been as grave and silent as a deaf canonness, or have run away from you as fast as my feet could carry me; but you spoke of better things, though gaily, and seemed to me to know, what is due from knight and gentleman, to a woman and a lady, and therefore, my good lord, I trust you as a friend, and speak to you as a brother."

Whatever were the feelings of Lord Chartley—whether he felt inclined to remain in the cool relationship of friend and brother, or whether there were not growing upon him, sensations towards his fair companion of a somewhat warmer nature, he was well aware that fraternal regard is one of the very best and most serviceable trenches for attacking the citadel of a woman's heart, and consequently he thanked Iola gracefully for her trust, and did nothing in the world to scare the timidity of early confidence. Perhaps his was a character to win it more quickly than that of most men; gay, cheerful, brave, apparently thoughtless, but in reality considerate and reflective, lighthearted from strong corporeal health, fair fortunes and self reliance, as well as from a hopeful and sanguine heart, one seemed at once to see clear and distinct from the act to the motive, from the words to the emotions in which they originated. There was none of that misty clouded policy, none of that obscure and twilight art, which is sure to create suspicion

and place the minds of others on their guard; but all was frank, open, free; and though people might judge him to be more rash than he really was, and heedless of consequences when he was in reality quite the reverse, no one ever for a moment suspected half the deep feeling that was in his heart, or the cool though rapid reflection which went on in his mind.

We are inclined to imagine that when a man acts quickly and decidedly, even in cases where there is no need of haste, that he acts imprudently, and without due consideration. We say—"he might have taken time for thought."

But thought is a very different thing in the minds of different men. With one, it is the cart-horse which plods slowly along with its heavy load from one point of the road to another. With others, it is the race horse, darting like an arrow shot from a bow to the object in view. The distance and the path are the same, but only they are travelled more rapidly in the one instance than in the other. Undoubtedly the race horse was the illustration

of Chartley's mind. It would have foamed and fretted to be restrained to the slow progress which many another man preferred; and when forced to proceed tardily, in order to keep the same pace as others, like the same horse, it would curvet and passage, showing its impatience by a thousand wild gambols.

Short specimens of conversations are enough upon all ordinary occasions; and therefore I will only say, that the young nobleman and his fair companion, followed by the Arab, at the distance of eight or ten yards, threaded their way through the wood paths, lightly and easily, talking as they went. It may seem strange that they so soon lost the sense of apprehension, and could converse on other things, while dangers were round about; but it was a part of the characters of both, to be little and but transiently impressible by any thing like fear. Hope was ever predominant in the heart of each, and hope is certainly a great element of courage. Danger was thought of only while it was actually present;

and imagination was fonder of plucking flowers than looking out for thorns. True they stopped and listened from time to time, to make themselves sure that no enemies were near. True, that when Iola had to lead the way through one of those narrow paths, where two could not go abreast, she sometimes looked back to assure herself that Chartley was near her; but when they were together, they generally conversed gaily, and often even laughed, although Iola felt some apprehensions for her good aunt and her cousin, which could not be altogether removed, even by Chartley's assurances that the burning of the houses upon the green, was the strongest proof of Richard's bands not having got into the abbey.

"Besides," he said, "I am quite sure that the commanders of these men, as long as they have the troops under their own eye, would not suffer them to commit any violence in a religious house; for the king himself is devout as we all know, and though he might wink at a violation of sanctuary, for his own purpose,

he would punish severely any unnecessary injury done in effecting it."

These arguments certainly were consolatory to Iola, and left the fears which still lingered, only as passing shades, coming across her mind for a moment, and soon disappearing, like those cast by light clouds, floating over the sun in a summer's day.

Onward they walked then, amidst the branches of the wood, and along the paths cut in the thick underwood, still covered by the brown leaves of the preceding year. The thaw which had prevailed since the night before, had penetrated even into the depths of the wood; and the grass was covered with unfrozen drops which rendered it almost as white as under the hoar frost. This was peculiarly the case, upon what may be called the first step of the hill; but the path soon began to ascend, at first winding gently about upon the upland slope, and then, spreading out to a greater width, ran along under some high cliffy banks, somewhat too steep to surmount

in a direct line. Here, from time to time, a beautiful view of the abbey, with the lower grounds surrounding it, might have been obtained, had there been daylight; and even in the darkness of the night, aided by a faint light from the smoking ruins of the cottages on the green, the eye could distinguish the sombre masses of the old pile, rising above all the surrounding objects.

"You see the abbey is safe," said Chartley, in a low tone; "and the fires are going out. I hear no sound.——Perhaps these troops are withdrawn."

"We could soon see," said Iola, "if we turned to the westward, for there is a little point, which commands a view of the road."

Perhaps Chartley did not very much wish to see; for to say the truth, he had no great inclination to part with his fair companion so soon. He had made up his mind, by this time, to the not unpleasant task of passing the rest of the night with her in the old castle. There was a spirit of adventure in it—a touch of that

romance which is agreeable to almost every young man's mind. Nevertheless, he thought it more proper to follow the suggestion, although the result might be to convey her back to the abbey, and send him onward on his way to Hinckley. They turned then in the direction she indicated; and at the distance of about a hundred and fifty yards, came to a spot where a small stream welled from the high bank, and the waters were gathered, before they crossed the road, into a small clear pool: a beautiful object and beautifully situated. The rugged cliff from which the spring flowed, like a parent looking into a child's eyes, bent over the fountain, and caught the image of itself. The stars were mirrored in it; and a light birch that grew beside it, bent its head down to drink.

"I will sit here," said Iola, "upon this stone, where I have often sat before, if you will run up the bank by that little path, which will lead you to a spot where a greater part of the road can be seen. Stop where the path stops; and do not be long, for I shall be fright-

ened. I do not know whether you can see anything upon the road in this dark night; but the sand is light of colour, so as to show anything dark moving upon it, I think."

"I will leave the Arab with you," said Chartley. "You can trust him fully. Stay with the lady, Ibn Ayoub," he continued, "and guard her as you would the prophet's tomb."

The man folded his arms upon his breast, and remained precisely in the same attitude, at the distance of three or four paces, while his lord ran lightly up the path; and Iola, seating herself by the fountain, gazed down upon the limpid water, from which a dim shadowy form looked up at her again. What were her thoughts then? Perhaps, she too, contemplated the result of all obstacles to her return to the abbey being removed, the consequent parting with her young and kind companion, and the probability of her never meeting with him again. It was not without a feeling of regret. She almost wished that she had not

proposed to Chartley, to see whether the troops were still there or not; and, then she was angry with herself for entertaining such feelings. Then she meditated upon the passing the night with him in the ruins; and certainly she did not regard such a thing in the same way that he did. She felt a little alarmed, of she knew not what, a hesitation, a doubt. It would feel very strange, she thought—almost wrong. While there had seemed no other choice, such feelings had never presented themselves, but now they were strong. It would be very pleasant, she could not deny, to have his society for some time longer—with friends and companions about them; but alone, in a remote place, with the world's eye afar—that eye which acts as a bond but a safeguard, a restraint but a justification—the matter was very different. Yet—strange, human nature!—when, a moment after, she heard a blast of a trumpet coming from the road, and a loud voice shouting forth some orders, it was a relief to her. Perhaps she feared the parting with Chartley so soon, even

more than passing of a night with him in the old castle. Dear girl, she could not help it. It was no fault of hers. Nature taught her to cling to that which had protected her. Nature taught her to love that which came upon her hitherto dull existence, like the first gleam of summer's returning sunshine into the wintry sky.

A moment after, Chartley's step was heard returning; and running down the bank, he said:

"They are upon the road still, and moreover, preparing to surround the wood by patrols, probably with the intention of searching it thoroughly to-morrow. Let us on sweet Iola, and seek our place of refuge, for we have no choice left; and they may perchance push some of their parties along these broader paths to-night. I should not like to come into collision with them, if I can help it. Here, let me stay your steps;" and once more, he drew her arm through his.

"I had hoped," answered Iola—little hypocrite—"that they were all gone, and that you

might be spared farther trouble on my account to-night."

"Trouble!" said Chartley; and he laughed. "I know not what you feel, dear lady; but I cannot, for my life, think all this night's adventure so very disastrous. I grieve, of course, that you should be alarmed or pained in any way; but, yet a few hours of such sweet society, the power of protecting, assisting, supporting you, the linking of feelings, and sympathies, and associations with yours, even for so short a space, has something very pleasant in it. Whatever may be our fate hereafter, Lady Iola, we shall both remember this night, as one of those high points of time, which raise their heads out of the ocean of the past, and glitter afar in the light of memory."

"I must tell him about myself and my fate," thought Iola; but Chartley pursued the subject no farther; and turning back upon their steps, they renewed their ascent towards the castle, winding along amongst the trees, which were

there farther apart and less encumbered by underwood.

How rapidly the wild encroaches upon the cultivated, when the hand of man is once withdrawn. In former years—not very long before, certainly not a century—the detached elevation in the wood, on which the castle stood, had been covered with smooth, clean-shaven green turf, without tree or shrub, which could cover an approaching enemy from the shafts of the garrison. It had its road winding round it from the principal gate, and passing, till it approached the edge of the neighbouring forest, within bow shot of some loop hole or battlement, at every turn. Now the trees had grown over the whole mount, as thick and close as any where in the wood—over road and all; and nothing but a pathway remained, where bands of retainers had formerly ridden up and down on horseback. The self sown oaks, indeed were small and thin; but there were some enormous ash trees, and large fine elms and beaches, which

no one would have supposed of so late a growth. A great number of birches—"the ladies of the wood,"—mingled their slight silvery stems with the sturdier and more lordly forest trees, and the winged seeds of the ash, wafted to the walls, had planted themselves here and there, wherever a fallen stone had left a vacant space in the mortar, and had shot up into feathery shrubs, fringing the ancient battlements and cresting the tall tower. Thus, in the early summer time, when leaves are green, the castle at a distance could hardly be distinguished from the forest.

Up the small path I have mentioned, Iola and Chartley took their way, and at length stood under the old arch of the barbican. One of the towers which had flanked it, had fallen down, and filling up the fosse, afforded a firmer path than the drawbridge, which, partly broken down, I know not whether by age or war, offered but an insecure footing. One of the long beams indeed, and two or three of the planks still hung by the heavy chain used for-

merly to raise the bridge; but Iola hesitated, although she had often crossed before, fearing in the darkness, to lose her footing on the bridge, or to stumble amongst the stones, if she chose the path over the fallen tower. Chartley instantly divined her doubt, and going on part of the way over the drawbridge, held out his hand, saying: "Let me steady your steps. It is quite firm."

Iola followed at once; and the Arab came after; but when they reached the great gate, the lady again paused, saying, "It is so dark, I fear we shall never find our way about the building, without the risk of some accident, for many of the steps are broken down, and fragments of the walls, encumber the doorways, although some of the rooms in the keep are almost as if they had been just inhabited. I wonder how long it is to daybreak."

"I have not heard the bell for lauds," replied Chartley, "and therefore, probably, three or four hours may elapse before we see the face of day. Perhaps, however, we can contrive to

light a fire somewhere in the court, for the high trees and walls would screen it from the eyes of the men upon the road."

"Let us find our way into the great court first," said Iola. "There is plenty of dry wood about the place, if we could but find a light."

"That will be soon obtained," answered Lord Chartley, "and, perhaps, something that may serve the purpose of a torch or candle also;" and, speaking a few words to the Arab, which Iola did not understand, he led the way forward, stretching out his hands, like a blindman, to make sure of the path he trod; for if the night was dark without, the darkness was doubly deep under the shadow of the arch. After passing through the gateway, the great court seemed light enough by comparison. In the centre rose the large keep or donjon tower, frowning heavily over the scene below; and forth from the side of the keep came a pile of very ancient buildings, now silent and desolate like the rest.

Chartley and Iola are now alone; for the

Arab had left them. But yet she did not and she would not fear, for she had great confidence in her companion, and woman's confidence is of a very capacious measure. Nor did he wrong it—shame upon him who does—but, guiding her quietly to the flight of steps leading into the keep, he made her sit down upon the dilapidated stairs, and stood beside her, talking about subjects which could awake no emotion, or a very slight one, and, informing her that he had sent the slave to seek for materials to light a fire. None of those events, however, occurred, which continually happen to people cast upon a desert island. There were none of those appliances or means at hand, with which wandering sailors are usually supplied accidentally. No bituminous pine was found to fulfil the office of a torch; and at length after the Arab's return, the only resource of the fugitives was to light a fire, after the most ancient and approved fashion, by a flint and steel. This, however, was accomplished with less difficulty than might have

been expected, the young lord's dagger supplying the steel, and flints being numerous in the neighbourhood. The old brown leaves, and the young but well dried shoots, soon caught the flame; and in a few minutes the joyous light was spreading round the old court yard, and raising Iola's spirits by the very look.

"Ah, now we can rest here in comfort," said the young lady gazing around her; "but the light is not yet sufficient to see the inside of the hall."

"But still you cannot sleep here, sweet Iola," answered her companion. "I and the slave will go in and light a fire in the hall, if you will tend this in the meanwhile."

"Nay," she answered, "I want not to sleep;" and she detained him gently by the arm. "Let us sit down here. See here is a stone bench bowered in the ivy. We can pass the night in telling tales; and first you shall inform me how you came hither on foot in the forest, when I thought you had gone away for Leicester."

Lord Chartley easily satisfied her on that point; and seated on the stone bench by her side, as near as possible, gazing from time to time on her bright countenance, by the gleams of the firelight, he related to her all that had occurred to him since he had left the abbey.

"As to my being on foot," he said, "your good friend the woodman judged it best that I and my Arab should leave our horses at his hut, for fear of attracting attention. All I hope is, that they will not be found there by these good gentlemen, who are watching the wood; for it might be dangerous if they were recognised as my property."

"There is a great risk indeed," said Iola anxiously. "What will you do if such should be the case?"

"As best I can," answered Chartley. "I never premeditate, dear lady; for I always remark that those who go lightly and carelessly through the world, go the farthest. The circumstances of the moment determine my conduct; and as I have no ties to bind me but

those of honour and truth, no ambitious schemes to be frustrated or executed, no deeds done that I am ashamed of, so I have never any great store of fears for the future, nor much need of forming plans at any time for after action."

"Happy are those," answered Iola with a sigh, "who, as you say, have no ties to bind them."

Her reply was a natural one, springing at once from what was passing in her own heart. Something had whispered that it would be better to tell her companion, that her own fate was linked to another, that she had been contracted in fact in infancy, by her relations, to a person of whom she knew nothing. The thought of informing him of her fate, however, led her to think of that fate itself; and thence came the sigh and the answer that she made. But as soon as it was uttered, she felt that it rendered more difficult, nay impossible, the task of telling the circumstances as she had meditated. The words she had just spoken, the sigh she had just breathed, expressed too clearly the regret

that she really felt; but to explain to him the source of that regret, to show him the nature of the tie that oppressed her, would, she thought, be unwomanly and indecent.

Her words, however, had not been unmarked; and Chartley, reading them wrongly, pressed her gaily for explanation.

"Nay," he said, "you have no ties to regret. Your good aunt, the abbess, told me herself, that you are not destined for the life of the convent. If you do take the veil, it must be from some fancied resolution of your own heart, against which, it is the duty of every knight and gentleman to war. Fie, fie! Let those who have tasted the world and found it bitter; let those to whom it has pleased Heaven to deny beauty, and grace, and mind, and kindly feeling; let those who have sorrows to mourn, or evil acts to repent, seek the shades of the convent; but do not bury there charms of person, and mind, and heart, such as yours, intended by Heaven to be the blessing and the

hope and the comfort of another. I must not, I will not have it."

He spoke so eagerly, so warmly, and his eyes looked so bright, that Iola felt glad the Arab was standing near piling fresh wood upon the fire. She knew not how to answer; but at length she said. "I am not destined for a convent; but there may be other ties as binding as the vow to the veil."

"You are not married," exclaimed Chartley, starting; and then he added, with a laugh—a gladsome laugh. "No, no. You told me yourself that you had only seen one other young man twice in life besides myself."

"No, not married—" answered Iola, casting down her eyes, and speaking in a low and sad tone. But her farther reply was interrupted; for the Arab suddenly lifted his finger with a warning gesture, and said in a low voice:

"Steps come."

"Let us into the old hall," said Chartley, rising, and taking a burning brand from the fire. "This will give us some light at least.

Ibn Ayoub, stay you in the archway till I return. I will come directly; but let no one pass."

The Arab drew a long sharp pointed knife from his girdle, saying; "I will take care;" and the young lord and Iola hurried, through the gateway of the keep, into the interior of the building.

CHAPTER XII.

In a small, but rich and beautiful Gothic chamber, splendidly decorated, and splendidly furnished, sat a gentleman, in the very prime of life, at a table covered with manifold papers. His dress was gorgeous; but the eye rested hardly for a moment on the splendour of his apparel, for there was something in his countenance which at once fixed all attention upon itself. The features were delicate and beautiful, the eyes dark, keen, and expressive. The lips were somewhat thin, and apparently habitually compressed, though when they parted they

showed a row of teeth as white as snow. The long dark brown hair was of silky fineness and gloss, bending in graceful waves about a brow broad, high, and majestic, which would have been perfect in form, had not habit or nature stamped a wrinkled frown upon it, while some long lines, the traces of deep thought, furrowed the wide expanse which age has not yet had time to touch. He was in the prime of life, the early prime, for he had not yet seen three and thirty years; and not a particle of bodily or mental energy had been lost; but yet his form did not give any promise of great strength, for he was somewhat below the middle height, and the limbs seemed small and delicate. One shoulder was rather higher than the other, but not so much so as to be a striking deformity; and the left arm seemed somewhat smaller than its fellow. No means had been taken to conceal these defects; and yet he might have passed anywhere for an exceedingly good-looking man, had it not been for a certain expression of fierce and fiery pas-

sion which occasionally came into his countenance, blending strangely with the look of sarcastic acuteness which it usually bore. It was upon his face at that moment, as he read a letter before him; but it passed away speedily, and it was with a bitter smile he said—speaking to himself, for there was no one else in the room—

"Not know? He must be made to know! We will pluck the heart of this treason out;" and he wrote a few words hastily on the back of the letter which he had been reading.

Then, however, he paused, laid his finger on his temple, and thought deeply for a minute or two. "No," he said at length, "no! It must be passed over. If they catch him in the abbey, the lad's fault shall be passed over. He has served the purposes of a decoy—done good service without knowing it; and we will not kill the bird that lures the game to us, though it little thinks that it betrays its fellows—perhaps imagines it is serving them, not us. I have heard there was friendship between the

bishop and his father; and we must alienate no friends just now—Friends!" he continued, with a bitter sneer. "What are friends? I know but one, whom men can ever count upon; and he dwells here;" and at the same time he laid his hand significantly on his own broad forehead.

He then took the pen again, and struck out the words he had written on the paper, pushed it aside, raised another, and after glancing over it, clapped his hands, exclaiming—

"Without there!"

A servant instantly appeared; and the king, for it was Richard himself, demanded—

"Did you not tell me that this man, John Radnor, had been killed by a fall from his horse?"

"Yes, sire," answered the servant, "so the posts say, who brought your grace the news that the earl of Richmond's fleet had been dispersed. He was found dead upon the road, but with his purse and papers all secure, so that they could not be thieves who slew him."

"I trust there are few such left in the land," said Richard. "I have done something already to crush the lawless spirit engendered in this country by long turbulence and domestic strife; and I will trample out the last spark ere I have done. By Christ, the name of thief shall be unknown in the land if I live long enough.—I grieve for this man," he continued musing. "He was a serviceable knave, and one, to whose dexterity we could trust instructions somewhat difficult to write, and yet not make him an ambassador — Send Sir John Thoresby to me," he continued, "and as soon as Sir Charles Weinants comes, give him admission."

With a low reverence, the man withdrew: and the king busied himself with the papers again, till the door opened and a gentleman in black entered the room.

"Let those be answered, Sir John," said the king, pushing some letters to him, "and take order that lodging and entertainment be prepared at York for the Princess, Countess of

Arran. Send off too, by a private hand, which can be trusted, a letter to the king her brother, greeting him well from us, and telling him that the secret note, sent with the letters of the countess, has been received. Bid him set his mind at ease, for that the matter is very sure, and that search, as she will, search will be fruitless, so that she can come safely.—Have you seen the queen?"

"I passed her but now, your grace, in the hall," replied the gentleman; "and she enquired if there were any news from Middleham. She seemed much alarmed on account of the prince's illness."

"Oh, it is nothing, it is nothing," answered the king. "It will soon pass. Children are well and ill in a day. The next post will bring us news that he is better; but women are full of fears—Yet it is strange we have not heard to-day—I will go and see her, while you write here;" and with a slow pace and thoughtful air, he quitted the room.

At the end of a short corridor, Richard

opened a door which gave him admission to a large old hall, in one part of which were seated several young ladies of high family, working busily at embroidery frames. At one of the tall arched windows, gazing out on the prospect below, with a look of restless anxiety on her face, stood the fair and unfortunate daughter of the earl of Warwick, his youngest and his best beloved, whom with the prophetic spirit of parental affection, he had endeavoured in vain to hide from the pursuit of him, who never set his eyes upon an object without sooner or later attaining it. She was richly dressed, according to the mode of those times; and her slight figure and her fair face, still retained many traces of that delicate and feminine beauty which had once so highly distinguished them.

The instant she heard her husband's step, she turned quickly round with a timid and inquiring glance; but Richard was in one of his milder moods. The subject of his thought and hers, was one of common affection; and he

advanced tenderly towards her, and took her in his arms saying—

"I have heard nothing, Ann; but cast these fears from your mind. I trust that this is nothing but one of those sicknesses of childhood which come and pass away like spring showers."

The tears came into the queen's eyes, rising from very mingled emotions. Her apprehension for her child, her husband's tenderness, the feeling perhaps of her own failing health, the recollections of early years, all moved her heart; and yet she feared that her emotions might rouse an impatient spirit in Richard's breast.

It was not so, however; and pressing her somewhat closer to him, he said—

"Well, well, wipe away your tears, love. If we hear not better tidings to-day, thou shalt go to Middleham; and I will go with thee."

"Thanks, my gracious lord, thanks," replied the queen. "Perhaps it is but a weak woman's fears for her only one, that so sink my

spirit; but I feel to-day a sort of awe, as if of approaching fate."

"You give way, you give way," said Richard with a slight touch of impatience. "However, there is good news abroad. This rash, exiled earl of Richmond, whom you have heard of doubtless, has seen his Breton ships — which the good doating duke now bitterly regrets he lent him—dispersed and broken by a heavy tempest; and he himself has slunk back to St. Maloes; but I have already limed some twigs for this light bird, which will yet stick to his feet; and he may find conveyance into England more speedy, though not so prosperous as that which he has been contriving for himself.—How now, Lovel? You look perilous grim, as if you and your cognizance had changed countenances."

"I grieve to be the bearer of bad tidings, gracious sire," replied Lord Lovel, to whom these words were addressed, and who had entered the room the moment before: "I did not

know that either of your graces were here, and was hastening to your closet."

"But, the news, the news," cried Richard, eagerly. "Heavy tidings grow doubly weighty by long carrying—Out with them, man. Is there a new insurrection in the west?—Has Richmond landed?—Speak, speak at once!"

"I had better have your grace's private ear for a few minutes," replied Lord Lovel, in a low and very sad tone, at the same time giving a glance towards the queen. Her eyes were fixed upon his face; and she caught the expression at once.

"My boy," she exclaimed. "He is worse. He is hopeless—I see it there—I see it there;" and she pointed with her hand to his face.

Richard gazed at him in profound, deathlike silence, with his brow knitted over his fine keen eyes, and the thin, pale lip quivering fearfully. It was a terrible thing to see the traces of such deep and unwonted emotion on that powerful and commanding countenance; and Lovel felt al-

most afraid to proceed. Richard tried to speak; but for the first time in life, his voice found no utterance; and all he could do, was to make a vehement sign for his favourite to go on.

"Alas, sire," said Lovel, in a tone of unfeigned anguish, "your worst fears are, I grieve to say——"

"No, no," cried Richard, in a broken voice, grasping his arm as if he would have sunk the fingers into the flesh. "No, no, not the worst —not the worst!—He is very ill, you would say—The physicians have no hope—but we will find more, wiser, skilfuller! There are simples of great power—There are—There are—No, not dead, not dead—no, not dead, not dead!—Oh, Jesu!" and he fell headlong to the ground.

The unhappy queen stood with her hands clasped together, her eyes bent upon the floor, not a trace of colour in her cheeks or lips. She moved not, she spoke not, she wept not, she uttered no cry, but remained standing like a statue where the words had reached her ears

with all the terrible anguish of the moment concentrated in her heart.

In the meantime, the embroidery frames were cast away. Her ladies gathered round her, and drew her gently to her chair of state, in which they placed her unresisting; but there she remained, precisely as they had seated her, with her eyes still bent down, and her lips still motionless. At the same time, Lovel raised the king, and called loudly for assistance. Attendants hurried in, and amongst them the messenger from Middleham, who had brought the tidings of the young prince's death, and had been left at the door by Lord Lovel, when he undertook to communicate the sad intelligence. But it was long ere Richard could be brought to himself; and then he sat where they had placed him, rubbing his brow with his hand, and muttering broken sentences to himself. At length he looked up, and gazed with a curious, wild expression of countenance—still shrewd, still cunning, but hardly sane; and

then he laughed aloud, and rising from his chair, exclaimed:

"Why this is well. Why, this is mighty well! We'll march ten thousand men on York, to-morrow, and then to Middleham.—We'll have cannon too, aye, cannon too, lest the usurper should refuse to give up the boy. Why, he is the son of a king, a prince—a prince I tell you, Lovel, the dog—Ha, ha, ha! That was a merry distich—

> "The cat, the rat, and Lovel, the dog,
> Rule all England under the hog."

But we paid the poet handsomely.—Kings should be always bountiful to poets—Good Sir John Collingburn, he little thought that he should be hanged for the cat, drawn for the rat, and quartered for Lovel the dog—Ha, ha, ha! It is very good."

At that moment, the queen's lips moved; and raising her eyes towards Heaven, she began to sing a sweet and plaintive air, in a very musical voice:

"The castle stood on a hill side,
Hey ho, hey ho,
And there came frost in the summer tide,
Hey ho, the wind and the snow.

"A boy looked from the casement there,
Hey ho, hey ho,
And his face was like an angel's fair;
Hey ho, how the violets grow.

"The snow, it fell on his golden hair,
Hey ho, hey ho,
And the wind has blighted the flower so fair,
Hey ho, the flower's laid low."

I think I'll go to bed, ladies. It is growing dark; but this night gear is somewhat stiff and cold, and I think it is dabbled with blood—— Blood, blood, blood! Yes it is blood!" and she uttered a loud scream.*

In the midst of this distressing scene, Lord Lovel stood like one bewildered; and he noted

* For an account of the terrible effect—approaching to madness—of the death of Edward, Prince of Wales, upon Richard III. and his queen, see the history of Croyland Abbey.

not, that while the king was speaking, another person, none of the ordinary attendants had entered the room. Now, however, Sir Charles Weinants pulled him by the sleeve, saying in a low voice: "I ought to speak with the king immediately; but he seems in no fit state, my lord. What is all this?"

"Hush, hush," said Lovel, in a whisper. "Go into the closet. I will come and speak with you, for I have full instructions. The king is indisposed, with the sad news from Middleham. He will soon be better. I will join you in a minute. Your business will bear no delay."

Thus saying, he turned to the king again; and Sir Charles Weinants, with a slow and quiet step, crossed the hall, and proceeding through the short corridor I have mentioned, reached the king's closet. He there found Sir John Thoresby, writing diligently; and the latter merely raised his head for an instant, gave a brief nod, and resumed his occupation. Sir Charles Weinants, ever discreet, walked to the

window, and looked out; for, as I have before said, there were manifold papers and letters on the table, and he knew that it was dangerous, even to let the eye pause upon any of Richard's secrets. He waited there with persevering patience, saying not a word to Sir John Thoresby, and never turning round his head, till Lovel entered the room, at the end of about ten minutes, and boldly dismissed the secretary for a few moments.

"Now, Sir Charles," said the king's favourite. "His grace, thank Heaven, is somewhat better, and will soon be well. We have persuaded him to let blood; for his spirits are too much oppressed. This is a severe blow, the death of the young prince, and will make many changes in the realm. You received the king's letter?'

"In safety, my good lord," replied Sir Charles, "but not the letter which was to have followed, informing me whether the Duke of Bretagne would receive me on this errand or not."

'How is that?" exclaimed Lord Lovel. We sent it to York, thinking to find you there;" and he laid his hand upon his brow and thought. "Ratcliff, in his last letter, received but this morning, assured me that he had sent it on to you at Tamworth, by a trusty messenger, who was passing from Scotland to the king. Now, it should have reached you some days ago, for Ratcliff thought we were at Coventry, and his letter to me has gone round.

"It never reached me, my lord," replied Sir Charles Weinants, "and yet I made known my name and quality wherever I came, and bade my servants watch well, in order that no news from the court might miss me."

"It must be inquired into," replied Lovel; "but, in the mean time you must hasten your departure; for I have seen the reply from Bretagne, and you will be received with all favour. Monsieur Landais is fully gained; and all that is required, is some one to confirm the king's promises, and give an earnest of his

goodwill towards the duke. You must set out this very night. I trust by that time, his grace will be well enough to see you himself and give you his last instructions; for his is not a mind to bend long, even under the burden cast upon it."

These words seemed intended to conclude the conversation; but Sir Charles Weinants still stayed and mused. At length he looked up in Lovel's face with a smile, saying, "I always love to be successful in my negociations; and methinks, this young vapouring earl may take fright when he hears of my coming. Were it not better to go with the most perfect secrecy?"

"Nay, that would be hardly possible," answered Lovel; but we have been thoughtful. You must go in some sort as a fugitive. A report has already been spread that you are suspected by the king. Measures will be taken to strengthen the belief; and, while you bear full powers as his envoy, and the money for Landais, you must quit the court suddenly by

dark; and with a small train affect to seek refuge in Brittany. The news of your disgrace has gone before; but good Monsieur Landais is made aware of the truth, and prepared to receive you."

Sir Charles Weinants was not altogether well pleased with the arrangement; but he was discreet—very discreet; and he did not think fit to make any objection. However, he knew there could be no harm in establishing a claim where none previously existed; for he was well aware that great men are ever ready enough to deny a claim, whether it exists or not. He therefore said quietly. "The king's will, of course, I submit to without a murmur, my good lord; but it is a very unpleasant sort of reputation for an ambassador to appear with, that of a fugitive and a traitor; and I trust that his grace will remember that I take upon myself such a character solely in obedience to his commands."

"You shall not be forgotten, Sir Charles," replied Lovel; entertaining, but not uttering

precisely the same sentiment, which was afterwards boldly propounded by a vast minded but little spirited man; namely, that "to submit to indignities is the way to rise to dignities."

"The king never neglects," he said, "those who place themselves in painful situations for his service. And now, Sir Charles, prepare, prepare—but quietly; never forgetting that your preparations are to be those of a fugitive. The ambassador is to come after, you know. When you have Harry of Richmond firm in your grasp, the splendour of your train shall efface the memory of its scantiness now. Hark! There is the king's voice, and his step coming hither. Do not wait or take any notice. I dare say the barber is here to bleed him." *

The next instant Richard entered the closet; and Sir Charles Weinants passed him, bowing

* Richard's attempt to obtain possession of the person of Richmond by bribing Landais, the duke of Britanny's minister, is too well known to need particular notice.

low and reverently. But the king took no farther notice of him, than merely by giving a slow and inquiring glance, from under his bent brows, at the face of his envoy; and then seating himself in a chair, he suffered one of two persons who followed him into the room to withdraw his arm from his doublet, the barber-surgeon, who was close behind, directing the valet particularly to give him the left arm, as that was nearest to the heart. The servant then held a silver basin, while the operator made his preparations and opened a vein. During all this time Richard uttered not a word, but sat with his brows contracted, and his dark thoughtful eyes fixed upon vacancy, till the sombre red blood began to flow forth from the vein; and then he turned his look upon the stream, and seemed to watch it curiously. At length, he lifted his right hand to his head, saying. "I am better—Open the window. Give me air;" and the servant instantly hurried to obey his commands. The barber suffered the blood still to flow on, for

a little while, and then bound up the king's arm.

"I am better, said Richard. "I am better; and stretching forth his hands, he added, in an imperative tone. "Leave me—All leave me! I am better—I would be alone."

The whole party hastened to obey, and as soon as they were gone, Richard, the iron spirited, relentless Richard, placed his hands before his eyes, and wept. It is a terrible sight, to see a man weep at any time. What must it have been to see tears forced from such a heart as Richard's.

CHAPTER XIII.

Let us take up the history of the woodman, after he and the bishop of Ely had quitted Lord Chartley. They crossed rapidly over the road, hearing the sound of horses advancing, and of men speaking, as they did so. Neither uttered a word; and the prelate was hastily directing his steps towards a spot, where, by the dim light, he saw what seemed a continuation of the path he had just quitted; but the woodman seized his arm, and drew him on a little way up the road to a place where the bushes seemed so thick as to afford no passage

through them. Putting aside the branches, however, with his sturdy arm, Boyd dragged rather than led Morton forward; and, for some way, the good bishop fancied that they should never find a path again, so thick and difficult seemed the copse. It extended not fifty yards however; and, though somewhat scratched by the brambles, which clung round his feet and legs at every step, Morton, at length, found himself emerging into an open part of the wood, where the ground was covered with thick fern, out of which, every here and there, rose an old hawthorn or the bushy shoots of an oak or beech felled long ago.

"'Tis a rough road," said the woodman, in a low voice, as he relaxed his hold of the prelate's arm.

"So are all the ways of life, my son," answered the bishop.

"And the roughest often the safest," answered Boyd. "I know it by experience. Smooth paths end in precipices."

At that instant, something started up before them out of the fern; and a quick rush was

heard through the neighbouring brushwood. The bishop started, and drew a little back; but Boyd said with a laugh,—

"'Tis but a doe, my lord. If she find her way amongst the soldiers, there will be more chases than one to night. Fear not however. I will answer for your safety, though not for hers."

"I do not fear," answered the prelate. "Indeed, I am little given to fear; but, as you doubtless well know my son, the mind has not always that command over the body which can prevent the mere animal impulse from starting at dangers, which calm consideration could meet unshrinking."

"True," replied the woodman. "So long as life is happy it may be so; but with the loss of all that makes existence valuable, the body itself loses its sensibility to all signs of danger. Hope, dread, anxiety, and the struggle with the ills of life, make us vibrate as it were to the touch of all external things; but when hope and fear are dead, when there is neither care nor

thought of existence, 'tis wonderful how this blind horse of the body, ridden by that plodding wayfarer, the mind, learns to jog on, without starting at anything that glistens on the way—But come on, my good lord, for I must take you first to my cottage, and then send you forward some miles upon your journey."

Thus saying, he walked forward; and the good bishop followed through the more open space, musing as he went; for to say the truth, he was pulled different ways by different inclinations. Self preservation, was, of course, one great object; and that led him to desire immediate escape: but yet there was another object, which he had much at heart, and which would have bound him to remain. Nor was he a man who would suffer the consideration of personal safety alone to make him abandon what he considered a duty; but, as yet, he knew not fully what were the risks, and what the probabilities; and, as the only means of obtaining information, he, at length, after some consideration, determined to have re-

course to the woodman. Boyd was striding on however; and it cost the prelate two or three quick steps to overtake him, so as to be able to speak in that low tone which he judged necessary in the existing circumstances.

"You think you can insure my safety," he said.

"Beyond a doubt," replied the woodman laconically.

"But only, I suppose, by instant flight," said the prelate.

"By flight before daylight," replied Boyd.

"But if I tell you," continued the bishop, "that it is absolutely necessary, for a great purpose I have in view, that I should remain in this immediate neighbourhood for some few days, do you think it possible for me to lie concealed here, till I receive the intelligence I am seeking? Remember, I do not heed a little risk, so that my object be attained."

"That is brave," answered Boyd; "but yet 'tis difficult to weigh nicely in the balance, for another man, the estimation of his own life.

If I knew what you sought, I could judge better. However, I will say this: the risk were very great to stay, but yet such as any one of courage would encounter for a great and noble object."

"Then I will stay," replied the bishop firmly. "My object is a great, and I believe, a just and holy one; and life must not be weighed in the balance against it.

"Would that I knew what it is," said the woodman, "for methinks I might show you that more may be gained by going than by staying. Of that, however, anon. Let me see if I can divine your object."

The bishop shook his head, saying—

"That is not possible. You are keen and shrewd I see; but this you could not discover by any means, without information from others."

"I may have more information than you fancy," answered Boyd; "but at all events you must tell me fairly, if I am right. You were once esteemed and promoted by

Harry the Sixth. The house of Lancaster gave your first patrons."

The bishop winced a little—

"True," he said, "true!"

"The house of Lancaster fell," continued the woodman; "and after the king's death, you continued in office under the opposite faction—I do not blame you, for the cause seemed hopeless."

"Nay, but hear me," said the bishop in a louder tone than he had hitherto used. "You speak somewhat authoritatively; and I must explain."

"I speak plain truth," replied the woodman. "At this hour of the night, and under these gray boughs, we are upon a par. Elsewhere, it is, Morton, Lord Bishop of Ely, and Boyd the woodman. But I have said, I blame you not. What need of explanations?"

"Yes, there is need," answered the bishop. "I had my motive for doing as I have done; and that motive sufficient for my own conscience. As you say the cause of Lancaster

had fallen, and hopelessly fallen. All efforts in its favour could but produce more bloodshed, and protract a desolating civil strife. By yielding to the conqueror, by giving him the counsel of a christian man, not unversed in affairs of state, I did believe—I do believe, that I could, and did do more good, than if I had withdrawn from the counsels of the ruler of the country, and joined with those who sought to throw him from his seat. I never advised in those affairs, where York and Lancaster opposed each other. It was part of my compact with him, that I should take no share in acts or councils against a family I once had served. Yet in my humble way I could do good, in moderating the fury of men's passions, and the rancour of party strife."

"You plead, my lord, to an indictment I have never laid," replied the woodman. "I blame you not. I never thought of blaming you. But hear me on! You became attached to a prince who favoured you greatly—a man of many high qualities, and also of many

great vices; brave, courteous, graceful, and good-humoured; lewd, idle, insincere, and cruel; a consummate general, a short seeing statesmen, a bad king, a heartless kinsman, a man of pleasant converse, and a devoted friend. You loved him well; you loved his children better, and would not consent to their murder."

"Nay, nay, not their murder," cried the bishop; "no one ever ventured to speak of their death. Even now, we know not that they are really dead; but I believe it. If you had said, I would not be consenting to their deprivation of their rights, you had been justified."

"'Tis the same thing," answered the woodman; "deposed princes live not long, where they have many friends in the realm they lose. However, committed to the tower, and then to the custody of Buckingham, you found means to make of your jailer your friend, choosing dexterously a moment of disappointment to turn him to your purposes. I speak now only from hearsay; but I am told, you two together framed a scheme for choosing a

new king from the race you first served, and uniting him to the heiress of your second lord. It was a glorious and well devised plan, worthy of a great statesman — ay, and of a christian prelate; for thereby you might hope to end for ever, a strife which has desolated England for half a century—but rash Buckingham lost all at the first attempt. The scheme still lives however, I am told, though one of the great schemers is no more. The other walks here beside me, returned in secret to his native land, after a brief exile, and the question is, for what? Money perhaps, or arms, or friends, I may be told. Yet he would linger still for some intelligence, even when his life is staked! Has he heard of machinations going on in Britanny, for the overthrow of all his plans, by the betrayal of him on whom their success depends? Has he heard of secret negociations between the usurper, and a feeble duke or his mercenary minister? Does he wish to obtain the certainty of such things?

and is he willing to stake his life upon the chance of discovering the truth?"

He paused as if for an answer; and the bishop who had been buried in deep thought—considering less the questions put and the tale told, for all that was speedily digested, than the character of his companion — replied at once—

"You are an extraordinary man, sir, and must speak from something, more sure than a mere guess."

"Assuredly," replied the woodman, "I speak from calculation. He who, in the calm retirement of a lowly station, removed afar from his fellow men, has still a fair view of the deeds they do, can often, by seeing things, hidden from the eyes of those who are near the scene of action, judge of the motives and the result, which the one part of those engaged do not know, and the other do not perceive. I once stood upon a high hill, while a battle raged at my feet, and could I have directed, with the prospect of the whole before me, I

could have made either army win the field; for I saw what neither saw, and understood what neither understood. Thus is it with a man who stands afar from the troublous strife of human life, with his eye above the passions, the prejudices, and the vanities which more or less interrupt each man's vision on the wide plain of the world where the combat is going on. But yet you have not answered my question. Have I divined rightly or not?"

The bishop paused for another instant, and then replied—

"Why should I not speak? My life is in your hand. I can trust no greater thing than I have trusted.—You are right. I have heard of these machinations; and I have laid my plans for frustrating them, or at least discovering them. My faithful servant, companion, and friend, who has accompanied me in all my wanderings, has gone on with Sir Charles Weinants even now; for that is the man who has been entrusted with many a secret negociation between England and Britanny. He,

my servant, will return in disguise to seek me at the abbey; and if I go before he arrives, I carry no definite information with me."

"You must go before he arrives," replied the woodman, "or 'tis likely you will not go at all; but you shall not go bootless—Now let us be silent and cautious, for we are coming near more dangerous ground."

The hint was not lost upon the bishop, who, though bold and resolute, as I have shown, did not think it necessary to sport with life as a thing of no value. While this conversation had been taking place, they had traversed that more open space of forest ground, which has been mentioned, and were approaching a thicker copse, where sturdy underwood filled all the spaces between the larger trees. It seemed to the bishop, in the dimness of the night, that there would be no possibility of penetrating the vast mass of tangled thicket which rose sweeping up the side of the hill before his eyes; but still the woodman bent his step straight towards

it, till at length he paused at a spot where there seemed no possible entrance.

"We are now coming near one of the wider roads of the wood," he said, in a whisper; "and the little path by which I will lead you, runs within a hundred yards of it, for more than a mile. We must therefore keep silent, and even let our footfalls be light."

"If we have to force our way through all this brushwood," answered the bishop in the same tone, "the noise will instantly betray the way we take."

"Fear not," replied Boyd, "only follow me close and steadily. Leaders make bad followers, I know; but it must be so just now."

Thus saying, he pushed aside some of the young ash trees, and held them back with his strong arm, while the bishop came after. Three steps were sufficient to bring them, through the thick screen, to the end of a small path, not above three feet in width, but perfectly clear and open. It was drawn in a line as straight

as a bowstring, and had probably been formed for the purposes of the chase; for arrow or bolt sent along it, could not fail to hit any object of large size, such as a stag or fallow deer, at any point within shot. The bishop, it is true, could not see all this, for the boughs were thick over head, though cleared away at the sides; and he followed slowly and cautiously upon the woodman's steps, setting down his feet with that sort of timid doubt, which every one feels more or less when plunged in utter darkness.

Steadily and quietly, the woodman walked on, seeming to see his way as well in the deep night, as he could have done in the full day; and at length, after having proceeded, for what seemed to his companion, much more than one mile, he again stopped, where the path abruptly terminated in another thicket. As no sign would have been effectual to convey his meaning, in the profound darkness which reigned around, the woodman was fain to whisper to his companion, to remain for a moment where he stood,

while an examination was made to ascertain whether the great road was clear. He then forced his way forward through the boughs; and a moment after, the bishop heard the whining of a dog, followed by the voice of the woodman, saying, "Down, Ban, down. Seek, boy, seek. Is there a strange foot?"

A short interval elapsed; and then was heard the sound of a low growl, very close to the spot where the prelate himself was stationed.

"Nay, that is a friend," said the woodman, in a low tone. "Come in Ban! To heel, good dog."

The sound of the stout and stalwart form of his companion, pushing its way once more through the brushwood, was then heard; and Boyd again stood by the good prelate's side.

"All is safe," he said; "and now you must force your way forward, at the risk of tearing your gown. But never mind that, for you must not travel in this attire;" and he led the way on.

After a struggle of some difficulty, with the brambles and thin shoots of the ash, which formed the copse, the bishop found himself in the midst of a small open space, with the road running across it, and the woodman's cottage on the other side. The door was open; and a faint glare, as from a half extinguished fire, came forth into the air, showing the tall, sinewy form of the woodman, and the gaunt outline of his gigantic hound. The cottage soon received the whole party; and, closing and barring the door, Boyd pointed to the threshold, saying to the dog, "Down, Ban! Watch!" and immediately the obedient animal laid himself across the door way, and remained with his head raised, his ears erect, and his muzzle turned towards the entrance, as if listening for the sound of approaching footsteps.

"Now, reverend father and good lord," said Boyd, "we must not dally. You must throw away that gown, and put on this common waggoner's frock. You must cover the tonsure with this peasant's bonnet, and take part in

driving a load of wood a stage on the way to Litchfield. You will be met with by those who will see you safely to the coast; and you will have one with you, who will in reality perform the office—unworthy of your profession and name—which you must seem to fulfil only for the sake of security. I will bring you the garments in a moment; but first," he continued, "let me place in your hands this letter, which you must conceal with the greatest care, and contrive to convey it to the earl of Richmond. How it fell into my hands matters not; but if you run your eye over it, you will see, that it contains all the information for which you were inclined to wait—Stay, I will give you a light;" and stirring the fire into a blaze, he lighted a lamp at the flame.

"Ha, from Landais, himself," exclaimed the bishop, as he read the letter, "with a promise to arrest the earl and all his companions, as soon as Richard's ambassador has arrived, and the money is paid!—The money is paid! What may that mean?"

"Can you not divine, good father?" asked the woodman. "In this good world of ours, there is a price for everything. We are all merchants, traders with what we make, or with what we possess. One man sells his barony, another his honour, another his conscience, another his soul. One acquires for himself power and sells the use of it, another gains a reputation and trades on that, as others do on learning or on skill. There is a difference of prices too; and the coin in which men require payment, is various. A kingly crown is the price which some demand; a high office the price of others. The crosier or the triple crown is one man's price; the smile of a fair lady is another's; the sordid soul requires mere money; and this Landais, this Breton peasant, risen to be the minister and ruler of his imbecile prince, sells the duke's honour and his own for hard gold. Ha, ha, ha! He is quite right; for, of all the things which go to purchase such commodities, gold is the only solid, permanent possession. What is honour, fame, power, or

even woman's smile, but the empty, transitory, visionary deceit of an hour. Gold, gold, my lord bishop, untarnishable, persisting, ever-valuable gold is the only proper payment, when honesty, honour, feeling, and character are to be sold—Upon my life, I think so!—But there is the letter. Let the duke have it; show him the toils that are around him; and bid him break through before they close upon him."

"This is important, indeed," said the bishop, who had been reading the letter attentively; "and it shall be in the hands of the earl as soon as it be possible to deliver it. One question, however, let me ask you. Who, shall I tell the earl, has procured and sent to him this most valuable information? for I do not affect to believe that you are, that which you seem to be.'

"Nothing is what it seems to be," replied the woodman; "no, nothing in this world. It is a place of unreal things; but yet you might have satisfied yourself at the abbey, that Boyd

the woodman is a faithful servant of the good abbess and nuns of St. Clare, and has been so long enough for them to have great confidence in him—However," he continued, in a somewhat changed tone, "tell the earl of Richmond, you have had it from a man who may ask his reward hereafter; for we are all mercenary. That reward shall neither be in gold, nor estates, nor honours, nor titles; but, when the struggle before him is accomplished, and he is successful, as he will be, then, perchance Boyd the woodman may ask a boon; and it shall be but one—Now I bring you your disguise;" and, passing through the door in the back of the room, he disappeared for a moment or two, and then returned, loaded with various pieces of apparel. The bishop smiled as he put them on; and the transformation was certainly most complete, as the frock of the carter was substituted for that of the monk, and the peasant's bonnet took the place of the cowl.

"We must get rid of your sandals, my lord," said the woodman; "and that is the most difficult

part of the matter; for my foot is well nigh twice as large as yours, so that my boots will fit but ill."

"We will manage it," answered the bishop, "for I will thrust my feet in, sandals and all, and that will fill them up."

The woodman laughed; but the plan seemed a good one, and was adopted.

"Here is a little Venice mirror," said the woodman. "Now look at yourself, my good lord. I will not ask, if your best friend would know you, for dear friends always forget; but would your bitterest enemy recognise you, though hatred has so long a memory?"

"I do not think he would," answered the bishop, smiling at his own appearance; "but yet I fear, if we should be met in the wood by any of these people, and detained, they may discover me by the tonsure."

"We will not be met," answered Boyd. "Now, follow me; but first stick this axe into your girdle, which may serve, both as an ensign of your new trade, and a means of defence."

The woodman then led his companion through the door in the back of the room into another large chamber behind. Thence, after locking the door, he took his way through a shed, half filled with piles of firewood ; and then, proceeding through an orchard, surrounded on three sides by the forest, he entered a little garden of pot-herbs, at the farther end of which, was a fence of rough hewn oak.

On approaching the paling, the bishop found himself standing on the edge of a very steep bank, at the bottom of which he could catch the glistening of a stream ; and after a warning to take good heed to his footing, the woodman led him down a flight of steep steps, cut in the bank, to a small path, which ran along by the side of the water. The dell, which the stream had apparently channelled for itself, and, which was flanked by woody banks, varying from twenty to forty feet in height, extended for nearly a mile through the wood, and at length issued forth from the forest screen, at the edge of a rich and well cultivated tract of country.

At this spot there was a bridge, over which ran one of the roads from the abbey; but the little path, which the woodman and his companion were following, passed under the bridge by the side of the river; and Boyd continued to pursue it for two or three hundred yards farther. He then ascended the bank, which had by this time become low and sloping, and took his way across a field to the right, so as to join the road at some distance from the bridge. A few yards in advance, was seen a lantern, and a wood cart with its team of horses, and two men standing by its side. To one of these, the woodman spoke for a few moments in a low voice; and then turning to the other, he said, "You understand your orders, David. Here is the man who is to go with you—Now, my lord," he continued, in a whisper; "you had better get up on the front of the waggon. I must here leave you; for I have the security of some others to provide for."

"I trust my fair guide from the abbey has met with no peril on her return," said the

bishop in a whisper. "It would be bitter to me indeed, if any evil befel her in consequence of her charity towards me."

"I trust not," said the woodman; "but yet I now find she could not return to the abbey, and has taken refuge elsewhere. There were eyes watching her she knew not of, and help at hand in case she needed it. But I must go and provide for all this; for a fair girl like that ought not to be trusted too long with a gay young lord. He seems a good youth, 'tis true, though wild and rash enough."

"Oh, he may be fully trusted," replied the prelate. "I will be his sponsor, for he was brought up under my own eye, and I know every turn of his mind. His rashness is but manner, and his light gaiety but the sparkling of a spirit which has no dark thought or memory to make it gloomy. If he is with her, she is safe enough; for he would neither wrong her nor see her wronged."

"Nevertheless, I must see to the safety of both," replied the woodman; "so now fare-

well, and peace attend you—Stay, let me help you up."

Thus saying, he aided the bishop to mount upon the front of the cart; and at a crack of the waggoner's whip the team moved slowly on.

CHAPTER XIV.

The lighted brand which Chartley carried in his hand, hardly remained unextinguished till he and Iola had passed through the deep gateway into the large hall; but there they found much more light than they had expected, for the fire in the courtyard threw a broad glare over the two large windows, and served, in some degree, to illuminate the interior. It was one of those vast old halls, of which but few are now remaining, though at that time, no great baronial residence was without one of them. Some indeed were of greater extent than the

one I now speak of; but few, if any, had a bolder sweep of arch than was displayed by the vaulted roof which now covered the young nobleman and his companion. Time had spared it; and ruin had not as yet laid any hand upon it, so that the eye could roam through the framework of richly carved oaken beams above, without detecting any flaw in the slating which overspread the whole. No columns or obstructions of any kind interrupted the sight from one end to the other; and, by the flickering of the fire-light, Chartley could perceive two doors opening out of the opposite end of the hall, one upon the right hand and another upon the left. To the door upon the right, two or three stone steps led up from the pavement; and he inquired at once, remembering that Iola had boasted a thorough knowledge of the building, if she could tell him whither that entrance led."

"To the great square tower," she replied, "by a staircase in the little turret that you

might see at the side of the keep. It is very narrow, but quite good and perfect still."

"If the door be still there and sound," replied Chartley, "it will be as good a place of refuge as any; for the mouth of a narrow staircase is no bad spot for defence."

"I think the door is there," replied Iola; "but we can soon see."

"Thanks to the fire without, we can, sweet Iola," replied Chartley, walking forward by her side; but as he did so, his foot struck against something lying on the pavement, which he sent rattling to the other side of the hall. "Why, what is here?" he exclaimed, stooping down. "Some one has been lighting a fire here, not very long ago. And on my life here is a lamp too, seemingly not very long extinguished; at all events, there is oil in it."

"Oh yes, it is long ago," answered Iola, "as long ago as Christmas. I remember all about it now. The nuns come up here every year, on the morrow of Christmas, for there is still a mass, kept up once a year in the chapel;

and, the last time, sister Bridget left her lamp behind her, which she brought to light the tapers on the altar. It may now serve us in good stead; and I do not see why we should not light a fire here too; for they do so every Christmas day, and heat a flagon of Malvoisie, for the priest, who says the mass."

"Would to Heaven we had a flagon of Malvoisie to heat," replied Lord Chartley, laughing. "I know few things better, on a cold night or in a doubtful hour. Strange, sweet Iola, that so spiritual a thing as hope should go up and down, burn more faintly or more brightly, for the want or the possession of a few drops of grape juice."

"It may be so with men," answered Iola; "but I do not think it is so with women. Hope with me, never burns brighter than in a fine clear summer morning, when I hear the birds sing. There seems, in the sweet sounds and in the sweet sights, a world of promises from a voice that never lies."

"Oh yes, but Malvoisie is good too," an-

swered Chartley gaily, "especially when summer mornings are not here, when no sweet bird gives music, unless it be the hooting owl; and even Iola's eyes do not afford light enough to show one this great thick door, the hinges of which seem somewhat rusty."

As he thus spoke, with his foot upon the second step, he swung the heavy door backwards and forwards, with a grating sound, which seemed to make the old hall shake.

"Come," he continued, "I will go light sister Bridget's lamp at the fire, and see what good Ibn Ayoub is about. His watch has been undisturbed, or we should have had his Arabic gutterals finding their way into the hall, and echoing round and round as harshly as this rusty hinge. You shall stay near the other door till I return; but mind, if there should be anything like a fray, you run up here and shut yourself in. I am bound by knightly courtesy to take you back to the abbey safe and sound; and so if I am killed

you must take the task upon yourself, in justice to my reputation."

"Killed! Oh do not talk of such a thing!" exclaimed Iola. "I beseech you, my noble lord, think not of risking life in such a case."

"To protect and serve you," answered Chartley, "I would risk more than life, sweet girl, if I had any thing more than life to lose. A man's life is worth very little in these days; for there is so little certainty of its continuing from one hour to another, that, good faith, I am fain to shake my head every morning when I rise, to see that it is upon my shoulders. Buckingham and Hastings, Vaughan, Grey, and others, besides some hundreds more, would have done better to have died in the field, or in defence of some fair lady, than to have waited for the headsman's axe. I trust whenever my hour comes, that it will find me sword in hand. It is the only way I ever could make up my mind to look upon death complacently. I suppose I am a sad coward, for the thought of a sick bed, and feverish pillow, and lament-

able friends, and the grave doctor with a potion in his hand, frightens me immensely. Nor is the axe much better ; for it usually has its dull antecedents of trial, condemnation, gaping fools, and blocks and scaffolds; whereas, on the battle field, or in the lists, lance to lance, for a lady's honour, with stroke for stroke, and clanging trumpets, and charging horse, and shouts of victory, the spirit springs forth triumphant through the wounds of the flesh, and soars away to glory, with the light of renown upon its wings."

Iola sighed, she knew not why ; but still the enthusiasm touched her, and she felt a thrill run through her veins at his high words, which made her almost fearful of the sensations which were creeping over her heart.

" You do not make me brave," she said; " and therefore I will come with you under the arch, for I shall feel frightened if I lose sight of you."

" Oh, I will willingly live ever in your eyes,"

answered Chartley; "and he who reaches you, must first pass over my corpse."

Iola started; for it is not to be supposed that, in that age, she, or any one, was without superstition; and she read a sort of double sense in his words, which seemed to her almost to have the force of prophecy. She followed him closely, however, and only paused when she again got sight of the court-yard, with the Arab still standing quietly by the fire, upon which he had piled some more wood.

"Has no one come?" demanded Chartley. "Have you heard the steps again?"

"I have heard the steps," answered the Arab; "but no one has come. They seem to wander round and round the court; but the eye sees not the walker. 'Tis most likely an Afrit, watching this old castle. There may be treasures buried here."

"There is a treasure hidden here," replied the young nobleman, speaking to himself but thinking of Iola. "As to Afrits they never cross the sea. However, good Ibn Ayoub,

as we have not men enough in the garrison to man all the walls or guard all the gates, we will withdraw into the great hall, light our fire there, and close the door, though we cannot drop the portcullis. Bring as much of the embers in as you can contrive to carry, without burning your garments, and a quantity of wood, of which there seems a great store there in the corner."

"'Tis an old gate broken to pieces," said the Arab. "'Twill soon burn, for it is as dry as camel's dung."

Chartley waited and listened, while his slave performed the task he had set him about; and then returning to Iola, after he had lighted the lamp, he said—

"I can hear no sound. It was good Ibn Ayoub's fancy, I suppose, though his ears are as sharp as those of a page in a fairy tale. He traced me through the forest to-night, by the sound of my horse's feet, as surely as a hound traces the deer by the scent.—Nay, cheer up, sweet Iola, or we shall both grow sad

and fanciful in this old pile. What, though we have no Malvoisie, there is better wine than ever flowed from the grape, or was imprisoned in a bottle—the wine of the heart, dear lady, of the heart unconscious of evil, the bright gay spirit, the cheerful contentment with the event of the hour, the fearless trust of the morrow. 'Tis but a little time we shall be together. Let us make the moments pleasant as they fly; for to me they will fly all too soon. Come, let us look round the hall, and see what it contains;" and he held the lamp high up above his head, gazing round, but unable to see the whole of the vast extent of the chamber.

"Oh, there is nothing here," answered Iola. "It has been stripped of every thing, long, long ago. But there are some things in the chambers above, which the plunderers did not think it worth while to bring down, I suppose—settles and stools, and a huge bed, which they say was made in the room where it stands, and cannot pass the door."

"Come, we will go and see them," cried

Chartley. "Sitting on these cold stones is not made for those delicate limbs; and perchance we may find something which we can bring down. But first let the Arab light the fire here; and then we will try and close the great door."

No great difficulty occurred in either process; for the Arab contrived, on two broad pieces of wood, to bring in a sufficient quantity of embers speedily to kindle a large fire on the wide hearth of the old hall, and the ponderous door, though it had one or two large holes in it, and groaned most desperately at being forced to turn upon its hinges—a process which it probably had not undergone for more than half a century—nevertheless swung to easily enough, and the heavy bolt was forced into the deep hole made for its reception in the stone-work.

When the young lord turned round, after aiding the Arab in this work, the aspect that the hall presented was cheerful enough. The pile of wood on the hearth had caught fire at once; and, mingled with the smoke which was rushing up the wide chimney, were thick columns

of many coloured flame, which cast a warm and flickering glow over the ancient stone walls and upon the painted glass of the windows, where knights, and priests, and angels, and apostles, were grouped in somewhat strange confusion. In the bright blaze of the fire, on the opposite side of the hearth, stood the fair form of Iola, wrapped indeed in the earl's surcoat, which veiled, without altogether concealing the beautiful outline of the figure. The long sable lined sleeves trailing upon the ground, seemed to form a sort of train behind her as she stood, while the beautiful neck and shoulders rose from the furred collar, lightly fastened over her chest, and the fair and speaking countenance, turned towards those who were closing the door, was now shown in bright light, now cast into shadowy indistinctness as the flame rose and fell.

Chartley gazed at her, and thought it was the fairest sight he had ever seen; and sensations rose up in his breast, which he took no pains to master. He was young, free, trust-

ful, full of happy confidence in the future, and he said to himself—"Why not? Roam the world over, can I find anything more lovely than she *is*, more gentle, more sweet, more full of noble feelings and bright thoughts, than she *seems*. In marriage one always casts one's fate upon a die, the fall of which is uncertain. —Why not?—But not now, not now," he continued, the spirit of gentlemanly courtesy coming to guide him instantly; "I must wait till she is free from danger, and then seek her when she is safe and in the midst of her friends again. I must not agitate or alarm her now."

Though the resolution was a strong one, as well as a good one, it was difficult to keep the feelings which were busy at his heart, from influencing his manner in some degree. Nor to say truth, did he keep them in such subjection. He would have liked very much to make her sit beside him, and, with his arm cast around her, pillow her beautiful head upon his bosom, while she took the repose so needful to her.

He would have liked to stand before that open hearth, with her hand clasped in his, and their eyes fixed upon the faces and landscapes in the fire, talking of love and dreaming of happy days. He did none of these things; but yet there was a softness and a tenderness in his manner and his tone, every now and then, which went thrilling through Iola's young fresh heart, and creating dreads for herself and for him, which might have shaken her terribly, had it not been for the gay and sparkling spirit which broke forth in his conversation from time to time, and carried away all heavier thoughts upon its wings.

"Now come," he said, taking up the lamp after he had paused by her side for a moment, "let us go up to these chambers above, and see if we can find some seat or another, that we can bring down. You have been walking and standing a long, long while; and those beautiful little feet will be sadly tired, unless we can discover some means of resting them. I would rather walk an hundred miles than stand an

hour. I have always thought, that a bird's life must be a sad wearisome one, except when it is on the wing, to stand all day on a bare bough with those thin shanks of its, and nothing to do but trim its feathers."

"And sing its songs," said Iola following him. "It must have its consolation there."

Chartley went first, lighting her by the way; and the stairs, narrow and worn with many feet, soon afforded a fair excuse for taking her hand to lead her up. When once it was in his, it was not easy to part with it; and, as he held it neither very loosely nor very tightly, there seemed no plea for withdrawing it, so that it remained where it was, even after they had reached the top of the stairs, and had entered a low-roofed stone corridor, and a large old fashioned vaulted chamber, which had probably been the state bedroom of the former possessors of the castle. There, still, remained the great bedstead which Iola had mentioned, probably of the reign of Edward III. formed of dark black wood, apparently ebony, richly

carved and inlaid with ivory, upon the lower cornices. The rich hangings, with which it had been at one time adorned, had all been torn down and carried off with the bedding; but the framework was so artificially joined, that no means of removing it were apparent, without breaking it all to pieces; and it is probable that the rude soldiers, who had sacked the castle, were not disposed to burden themselves with any heavy booty. Marks on the floor, showed where three truckle beds had stood; but not one now remained; and the only seat to be seen, was a large chair of the same materials as the bed, with a footstool, from which the embroidery, that once covered it, had been ripped.

"These will do," cried Chartley. "The chair must have come up, and so it can go down the stairs. Then we will set it by the fire; and it shall be your throne, queen of the May, while I sit on the footstool at your feet, and Ibn Ayoub crouches, as is his wont upon the dry hearth. But you must be my lamp

bearer, or I shall never get them down;" and giving the light to Iola, he raised the chair in his strong arms. "It is as heavy as iron," he said, "but, it shall come down, if it were made of adamant."

As he spoke, an extraordinary sort of sound like a low groan, echoed through the room, so clear and distinct, that there could be no doubt their ears deceived them not. Iola started, and well nigh dropped the lamp, while Chartley set down the chair, and laid his hand upon his sword.

"It is some door, moving on its rusty hinges," he said, after listening for a moment. "The wind is blowing it backwards and forwards;" and taking up the chair again, he bore it into the corridor, while Iola went before with the light, gazing timidly around.

Nothing occurred to disturb them however; and at length, though not without difficulty, Chartley got the cumbrous seat down the narrow stairs. The Arab was now standing in

the midst of the hall, gazing towards the door, with his naked scimitar in his hand.

"What is the matter, son of Ayoub?" asked Chartley. "What have you heard?"

"Feet, and a groan," answered the Arab, with his dark eyes glaring in the fire light.

"Pooh, 'tis some rusty hinge," said Chartley, "and the feet of rats or martins, driven to take shelter here, by this long continued wintry weather.—Seat yourself here, sweet Iola. Put your feet to the fire, and dream of pleasant things, while I go up again and bring the stool."

Thus saying, he took the lamp from her hand, and re-ascended. He was not long absent; but Iola listened anxiously for his returning step. She felt safe while he was near her, but fearful, the moment he was away.

Chartley was soon at her side again, and placing the stool close to her feet, he seated himself thereon, and leaning upon the arm of her chair, gazed up into her face with a gay smile.

"Now, this is comfortable," he said. "We may pass the remaining hours of night cheerfully enough here; and if you doze, sweet Iola, your little head will but fall upon Chartley's shoulder, where it may rest as securely, though not so softly as on your own pillow in the abbey. There, seat yourself there, Ibn Ayoub, in the nook of the chimney, or your southern blood will be frozen in this cold northern night. Think no more of groans and footfalls. These are all tricks of the imagination—It is wonderful," he continued, turning to Iola, "what wild fancies superstition will beget, aye, and sad as well as wonderful, when one thinks of the horrible cruelties which reasonable men will commit upon the strength of stories, that a child should be whipped for believing. When I was in Flanders a few years ago, a poor woman was burned alive, in the public market place; and what do you think was the crime of which she was accused?"

"Nay, I know not," answered Iola; "but,

it should be a terrible crime indeed, to draw down so terrible a punishment."

"The tale is simply this," replied Chartley. "There was a poor woman in one of the towns of Flanders, who gained her bread by the work of her needle. One of those who employed her, was the wife of the bailiff of the black monks of that town; but when her work was done, the bailiff and his wife refused to pay the wages promised, and being poor and distressed for money, she was naturally importunate. Obtaining no redress, she applied to the curate of the village, where she was born, for advice and assistance. It happened, however, that the good man had been entangled in a lawsuit with the bailiff of the monks, and whatever was the advice he gave to the poor woman, their conference resulted in evil to both. The woman sent her daughter to demand a part of that which was due, if she could not obtain the whole; and the poor girl arriving, while the bailiff and his family were at dinner, stood beside the table for some time,

petitioning for payment in vain. Several days after, one of the family was taken ill and died. The disease it would seem was infectious; and before its ravages ceased, the bailiff and two others were dead. The rest of the family took it into their heads to accuse the poor woman, her daughter, and the curate, of having bewitched them; and fools and knaves enough were found to relate and to believe, that the curate had baptized a toad, and had administered to it the blessed sacrament, at the instigation of the poor needlewoman. The toad cut in four pieces, was said to have been thrown under the table, where the bailiff dined, by the woman's daughter; and upon this fabricated charge, the unhappy creature was cast into prison, put to the torture, and afterwards burned to ashes."

Iola shuddered.

"It is very horrible," she said, "and one can hardly believe that such cruelty can exist in the breasts of human creatures."

"Or such folly either," answered Chartley,

"as to suppose that the quarters of a baptized toad, could bewitch to the death three innocent people. If there be charms and periapts, they must be produced by other means than that."

"But do you doubt there are such things?" asked Iola. "We read of them continually."

"Ah, fair Iola," answered Chartley, "we read and hear of many a thing, which, tried by the strong tests of reason and religion, vanish away like empty dreams. If we but ask ourselves, thinking for one moment of the goodness and majesty of the Almighty, is it probable, is it possible, that God can suffer such things, there will be found an answer in our own hearts, which will banish all such imaginations."

Iola mused; and Chartley, laughing at the grave subject he had introduced, was proceeding to change it for some lighter topic, when the Arab suddenly rose up from the spot where he had seated himself, and lifted up his finger as a warning to listen.

"I hear something move," he said, "and not far off. Hark! You will hear."

Even as he spoke, a strange kind of whining sound, and then a dull groaning, came upon the air; and Chartley starting up, exclaimed—

"This is indeed very strange."

The sounds had ceased almost instantly; but a sort of long drawn sigh seemed to follow, and then a heavy rattling fall, as if a part of the wall had rolled down.

"Whatever that is," exclaimed Chartley, "it is in the court-yard. I will go out and see."

"Nay, nay, I beseech you," cried Iola, clinging to his arm, "do not, dear lord, do not rush into needless danger. Let us go up to the rooms above, and look forth from the windows there, as these are too high."

"Stay, I can reach them by the chair," said Chartley; and, placing the heavy seat underneath the window, the sill of which was a few inches above his eyes, he mounted upon it and looked out in silence, while Iola crept to his side, and raised her eyes towards his

face. After gazing for a few moments, Chartley held out his hand to her, saying—"Come up hither beside me, sweet Iola, and see what is here. Be not afraid. There is no danger."

Iola gave him her hand, and setting her light foot on the seat beside him, rose till her eyes just came above the window sill.

Her first impulse, had she not repressed it, when she obtained a view through the dim small pane into the ruinous court, would have been to utter a cry of terror and surprise; for certainly such were the sensations which she felt. The fire which she and her companion had left nearly extinguished, had been relighted and piled up with fresh wood, which was sending forth a volume of flame, higher than a man's head; but the object which most struck the fair girl as she gazed forth, was a dark black looking figure, sitting between the window and the fire, crouched up in the position often assumed by an ape, and seemingly holding its hands, to warm them at the blaze. The attire, as far as it could be seen, which

was very indistinctly, for the back being turned towards them was in deep shadow, appeared to be quaint and strange; and, rising straight up, though somewhat on the left side of the head, appeared a long thin object like a horn. Chartley continued gazing on this apparition in silence; but one glance was enough for Iola; and, springing down, she covered her face with her hand, saying in a low terrified voice—

"Oh, come down, come down!"

CHAPTER XV.

To the surprise of Iola, and certainly not less to that of good Ibn Ayoub, though with Mahommedan gravity he gave no voice to his wonder, Chartley burst into a violent fit of laughter.

"Good Heaven, what is it?" exclaimed Iola looking up; and at the same moment Chartley sprang down from the chair, still laughing.

"Forgive me, dear Iola," he said, taking her little hand and kissing it, "but did you ever see the devil play on a bag-pipe?"

"I never saw the devil at all," replied Iola with a bewildered look; "but I do not understand what you mean."

"I mean, sweet friend, that this is evidently a piper, and if I mistake not much, 'tis a man I saw in Tamworth this very morning and yesterday also. He seemed the life and soul of the people round, a merry, happy hearted fellow, whom they call Sam the Piper, with a breast without guile, if one may judge by his face, which bespeaks him no one's enemy but his own. Strange to say, he would drink neither wine nor ale, though I offered him either, and though his face betrayed many a potation past, if not present. Stay a while. I will go out and see. If it be the man I mean, I will bring him in; for by all means we will have the piper of our faction."

"But are you sure that it is safe," said Iola, timidly, but holding his arm to detain him.

"Oh, he will not betray us," exclaimed Chartley; "and besides we can keep him here as long as we like."

"But if it should prove to be the—the—" said Iola, adding after a moment's pause, "some evil being."

Chartley laughed again; and gently putting his arm round her for a single instant, he said—

"Fear not, Iola. With the angels in those eyes upon my side, I would undertake to protect you against all the evil spirits in the universe."

Iola dropped the eyelids over the lustrous orbs below; and a blush spread over her cheek like the crimson light of the setting sun. Chartley instantly withdrew his arm; and repeating—"Fear not," he opened the door and went out of the hall.

A few words were then heard, spoken without; and a moment after he re-entered, followed by Sam the Piper, with his beloved instrument still tight under his arm. The good man's steps were not quite steady, and certainly it was not natural feebleness that caused their vacillation. Yet his eye was clear

and bright; and his merry voice seemed not in the least thickened by any liquor he might have imbibed.

"Gad ye good night, lords and ladies, gad ye good night," he said as he entered, making a low obeisance, and producing at the same time a lamentable squeak from his chanter. "Gad ye good night, tawny Moor. I did not think to see your beautiful black face again for many a day. Gad ye good night, fairest of ladies. To see you and his dark lordship here, one would think one's self upon the confines of the upper and the nether world, with angels on the one side and devils on the other."

"Meaning me for one, knave," said Chartley, giving him a good-humoured shake.

"Ah, mercy, mercy, noble sir," cried the piper in a pitiful tone. "Shake me not; for my legs are not made of iron to-night, and my stomach is as full as my bag when well blown up."

"But your stomach has something stronger than air in it, if I mistake not," said Chart-

ley laughing, "Come tell me, sirrah, how it happens that you, who would take no strong drink yesterday, are well nigh drunk to-night."

"There's no contradiction in that," replied the man, "though I take no liquor, liquor may overtake me, and if a man is overtaken in liquor, the fault's in the liquor, not in him."

"Still, if the fault's in the liquor, and the liquor in him, the fault is in him," answered Chartley; "for learned doctors say that the thing which contains another, contains all that it contains."

"But, then," replied the piper, who, like many of his class, was exceedingly fond of chopping logic; "if the fault's in the liquor, and the liquor in him, he cannot be in fault, for the thing that contains cannot be in the thing contained. But marry, my good lord, the truth is, I made a promise to good sister Alice at the convent, not to get drunk at Tamworth fair, and gloriously I redeemed my word, and gloriously I got drunk afterwards."

While this dialogue had been proceeding, Iola stood by, marvelling greatly at all she heard ; for it was a scene altogether new to her, and one, of which in her simplicity and ignorance of the world's ways, she could have formed no conception. In her ramblings hither and thither, which her good aunt had permitted pretty liberally, she might indeed have seen, now and then a drunken man, for alas, drunkenness is a virtue of no particular age ; but she had never met with the merry reckless wine-bibber —one of the peculiar character of the good piper —who has an excuse for his sins always ready, by which he does not even hope to impose upon others, and certainly does not impose upon himself.

After a few more words of the same kind, Chartley moved her chair for her back to the fire, seated himself as before on the stool by her side, and while the Arab resumed his place, pointed to the opposite side, saying to the piper, "There, sit you down, and tell us what you've seen in the forest to-night."

" Good faith, I have seen nothing," answered Sam, " for the night's dark, and I have been somewhat dark too. After I had been to the abbey for the morning dole, to show good sister Alice that I had kept my word and was quite sober, I went away to the first tavern, and with all the pence I had collected in the fair, bought myself a stoup of small wine, and a farthing's worth of sugar.—Your lordship's groat helped me wonderfully—Then, not liking the thought of a forcible division of my property, I brought my wine up here, ensconced me in the doorway of the little tower, and went on sipping till I fell asleep. When I woke, it was black night; but there was still something left in my winepot, and I set to again to gain courage, and to keep out the cold. When I looked abroad, however, I soon saw that somebody had lighted a fire in the court; and I crept round and round on the walls, to see who it was, saying Paters and Aves all the time, and thinking it might be the devil had done it ; for

he, it is said, keeps up the best fire in his house of any man."

Lord Chartley gave a meaning and merry glance to Iola; and Iola smiled in return.

"At length, seeing no one there," continued the piper, "I ventured down into the court to warm myself, when suddenly your lordship came upon me, and took me prisoner. I suppose it was my mad pipes betrayed me, for like a chattering wife, they are always talking where they should not, unless I am careful to blow all the wind out of the bag. However, I am never much afraid of robbers, plunderers, camp-followers, or anything, for nobody meddles with a piper. You cannot have more of a cat than her skin, nor of a piper than his pipes, and neither the one nor the other is of much use to those who do not know how to handle them."

Chartley mused for a minute or two, and then said in a low tone to his fair companion:

"Do you not think, dear lady, that we could make use of this merry ribald, to communicate

our situation here to those who could give us intelligence—aye, and even help in case of need. It is very sweet," he continued, tenderly, "to sit here by your side, whiling away the livelong hours of night, with one so fair and gentle. But, I must not forget your comfort in my own happiness. You have passed a weary and an anxious night, and the sooner I can restore you to your friends, to tranquillity and repose, the better. I must find some other moment," he added rapidly, "brighter and calmer, to say more of myself—I think that we may use this man, who will not be stopped by the soldiery, to bear tidings of where you are——"

"Oh yes," exclaimed Iola, "let him go as quickly as possible to the abbey. My aunt will be sadly anxious about me."

"I fear that would be dangerous," replied Chartley. "Rather let him go to the woodman, tell him where we are, request him to send us information and advice, and, if possible, to communicate to the abbess, that you are

quite safe. That I think is the best course to pursue."

"Perhaps it is," answered Iola, and then in a lower tone, she added, "if you can quite trust to this man—He seems a libertine and a drunkard."

"You must not judge him too harshly," replied Chartley. "Most men, especially of his class, have their peculiar vices: but, though it may seem strange; from those vices you must not imply others of a different class and character. Nay more, there are faults which are almost always accompanied by certain better qualities; and from what I know of the world, I am inclined to think, that this man's good faith might be better trusted than that of many a sanctimonious friar or smooth-spoken, propriety-loving trader."

"But is he fit?" asked Iola. "To me he seems hardly sober."

"Oh, fit enough," answered Chartley. "With daily tipplers a certain portion of good wine is needful to sharpen their senses. That gives

them wit which takes away the wits of other men; and he is not likely to find more drink in the forest unless he apply to the pure stream. —Hark ye, good master piper. Tell me how much discretion is left in that noddle of yours?"

"Enough to prevent me running my head against a post, or leading another into a ditch," answered the piper. "Now, good my lord, did I not come down the stairs, from the little turret into the courtyard, with every stone step as frail and moveable as the rounds of ambition's ladder?"

"And thou art trustworthy, methinks," said Chartley, in a musing tone.

"Else have I drunk many a butt of good liquor to no purpose," replied the piper.

"How should that make thee trustworthy?" demanded the young lord.

"Because the liquor was sound and honest my lord," replied the piper; "and as by this time it must have penetrated every part, I should be sound and honest too. Moreover,

it was best half drunk in secret, so that secrecy's a part of my composition also."

"Well, I will trust thee," replied Chartley, "and if thou wilt win a gold angel, thou shalt have the means of doing so."

"I will not debate upon the question long," said Sam, starting up. "I am always ready to go upon a pilgrimage, and far readier to worship a gold angel than a painted saint. Let me see, six stoups, at one shilling and two pence the stoup, would be—soul of my body there's drink for a week in a gold angel."

"There, there, cease your calculations," cried Chartley; "first win the angel, and then use it discreetly afterwards."

"So shall it be my better angel," said the piper, laughing, and winking his eye. "But how is the celestial coin to be obtained, my lord?"

"Listen, and you shall hear," replied the young nobleman; "and be serious now, for this is a matter of importance. Do you know Boyd, the head woodman of the abbey?"

"Do I know the great oak of Ashton?" exclaimed Sam. "Do I know the old tower of Tamworth? Do I know anything that men frequenting this neighbourhood see every day? —Why, Boyd has given me both a beating and a breakfast, at times, has made my back groan under a cudgel and under a bacon—That last was a good deed, for it saved my boy, who is now over the sea with the Marquis of Dorset, from starving, when he was hid away in Mount Sorel wood. Oh yes, we all know Boyd: the roughest tongue, the hardest hand, the clearest eye, and the kindest heart in the country."

"Well then," said Chartley, "I wish you to find him out, and to tell him for me, that I am here in the old castle, and have a lady with me whom he wots of. My name, I suppose you have learned from the horse boys, by your be-lording me so often; and he will divine who the lady is, if you tell him that she is with me, and safe, but that we dare not venture forth without further information, while these soldiers are watching the wood. Let him send

word to the lady's friends that she is in security, but above all, give us intelligence and help if he can."

"Soldiers watching the wood?" said the piper, in a tone of surprise.

"Aye, even so," answered Chartley. "Thou hast been like one of the seven sleepers, my friend, and hast dozed, unconscious, while great events were going on around thee. Half the houses on the abbey green have been burned; and there are bands now upon all the great roads of the wood. Does that frighten thee?"

"Not a whit," cried the piper. "How should it frighten me? They could but slash the sow's stomach under my arm, or my own; and neither the one nor the other is worth the sharpening of a knife. They'll not harm me; for all your mud-splashing, sheep-stealing, wench-kissing, big-oathed, blaspheming horse troopers are fond of a minstrel; and I will strike up my pipes when I come near the high road, to let them know who I am. It may be

a signal to old Boyd too, if he's wandering through the wood, as most likely he is; for, like a ghost, he goes about more by night than by day.—Burned half the houses on the abbey green! That's serious. By my pipes, some necks 'll be twisted for it I think."

"I trust there will," answered Chartley; "but now set out upon your errand, my good man, and when next you see me, my message being delivered, claim of me a gold angel; but if you say a word of it to any one else but Boyd himself, when next I see you, you shall have another sort of payment."

The piper laughed, and giving the bag under his arm a squeeze, made his pipes squeak in a very ludicrous manner. Then quitting the hall, with a steadier step than that with which he had entered, he took his way down through the wood which had often been his home during many a warm summer night. Most of the paths were familiar to him; and trudging on, he entered one of the broader ways, which led directly to the high road that divided the forest

into two unequal parts. After he had gone on for about half a mile, he heard voices speaking, and paused for an instant to consider. "I will be very drunk," he said to himself. "Drunkenness is often as good a cloak as hypocrisy. All men make their garments out of the skins of beasts; and the smoothest are not always the thickest. Here go I then;" and assuming a reeling and unsteady step, he blew up the bag of his pipes, and soon, from the various stops, produced a gay, wild air, which would have been pretty enough, but for the continued dull squeaking with which it was accompanied.

"Ha, who goes there?" cried a voice, a minute or two after, as he emerged upon the road; and two mounted men were immediately by his side.

"Sam the piper, Sam the piper," he answered, in drunken accents, "And who are you, jolly boys? What do you keep the king's highway for? Are you looking to see if any man has dropped his purse? If so, I

cry shares; for by St. Dominic, there's nothing in mine. Now, marry, if a fat priest were to fall in your way, I would rather be his mule afterwards than before."

"Why so, knave?" asked one of the men.

"Marry, because he'd ride lighter I've a notion," replied Sam.

"Ha, say'st thou so, knave?" cried one of the men, lifting up his hand to strike him; but the other interposed, saying—

"Nay, nay, 'tis Sam the piper. He has a fool's privilege, and means no harm. Besides the man is drunk."

"Come, tell me, knave," exclaimed the other, "whither thou hast been wandering in the wood?"

"Nay, Heaven knows," answered the piper, "wherever wine and destiny led me. I have been asleep half the time; and since I woke, I have been walking about in the cool, to clear my complexion, and get the fumes of Tamworth fair out of my head; for I felt my knees weaker than they ought to be, and a

solemn sort of haziness of the wits, just such as the preaching parson at Ashton must have, after writing one of his sermons, and his congregation do have, after hearing one."

The two soldiers laughed; and the fiercer of the two demanded—

"Did'st thou meet any man in the forest?"

"Not till I met your reverences," replied the piper. "I do not know what any man should do here, unless it were to sleep off a tipsy fit, lose his way, or pick up a purse, though the last has grown a rarity since the wars came to an end. In former times men might gather purses like blackberries upon every bush. That was when I was a soldier. But that whorson poke with a pike I got at Barnet, crippled my crupper joint for life, and made me walk unsteady, which causes the poor fools to say I am drunk, though all the world knows that I live like an anchorite, eat herbs and roots, when I can get no flesh, and drink pure water, when there's neither wine nor ale to be had. Give

you good den, my masters—What's the time o'day?"

"Night, you drunken dolt," replied one of the men. "It's matins by this time; but are you sure that you have not seen a man in a friar's gown. If you lie to me, your ears won't be safe for the next month."

"A man in a friar's gown?" said the piper with a hiccup, "aye to be sure I did."

"When? Where?" cried the soldiers eagerly.

"Why in Tamworth, yesterday morning," answered the piper; and one of the men, giving him a smart blow with his fist, told him to go on his way, with no very commendatory valediction.

Playing his part admirably well, the piper reeled down the road, passing two other patroles, each of which stopped and interrogated him, as the other men had done: somewhat more briefly, however, when they found he had been stopped and questioned before. At length, sitting down by the road side, as if his

legs refused to carry him farther, when two of his interrogators had just passed on, he waited till they had gone to a little distance, and then plunged into the wood. He soon forced his way on, to one of the lesser paths, but there he stopped to consider, saying to himself — "How shall I make Boyd hear, if he be roaming about? I'll go straight to his house; but this forest is for all the world like a rabbit burrow; and I may be popping out of one hole while he is popping into another, if I cannot contrive to send some messenger to his ears, that will run a few hundred yards on each side of me, at least. I must not try the pipes again; but I will make the belling of a deer. If he hears that at this season of the year, he will be sure to come up to see what's the matter."

Accordingly, by placing his fingers after a fashion of his own upon his lips, he contrived to produce a very accurate imitation of the peculiar call of the deer at certain periods of the year. He continued to emit these sounds from

time to time, as he walked on, till at length he heard a rustle in the brushwood near.

"Now that's either a stag," he said to himself, "who like a young gallant of nineteen, makes love at all times and seasons, and I shall have his horns in my stomach in a minute; or else it is Boyd or one of his men, and I have hit the mark. I must risk the horns I fancy."

A moment after, a low voice said—

"Who goes there?"

"Sam the piper," answered our good friend, "looking for what he cannot find;" and the next moment, pushing through the shrubs, the tall and powerful form of the woodman stood before him.

"Ah, Sam," said Boyd, "what are you seeking, you drunken dog?"

"Seeking you, master Boyd," answered Sam in a very different tone from that in which he had addressed the soldiers. "I have news for you."

"Aye, and what may that be?" demanded Boyd with the utmost indifference of manner,

"some of the gossip of Tamworth I suppose. The bailiff has beat his wife, or the mercer's daughter has gone off with the smart apprentice; but I have other things to think of, master Sam, to-night. Have you heard that the rough bands from Coleshill have burnt the houses on the abbey green."

"Yes I've heard of it," answered Sam, "and there has been a great fire up at the old castle too."

The woodman started.

"At the old castle! What do you mean?" he exclaimed. "Who should burn the old castle?"

"I didn't say it had been burned," replied the piper. "I only said that there was a great fire there; and very comfortable it was too, considering the cold night and the good company."

"Speak out man! What do you mean?" demanded the woodman sternly. "This is no time for fool's play."

"I think not," answered the piper; "and so the plain truth is, that I was ordered, by a

certain young lord, to tell you, that a certain young lady is up there safe with him and his tawny Moor, and that they are afraid to stir out while the wood is watched by the soldiers, without farther information and advice; and they look to you to give both, and moreover to send intelligence to her friends, that she is quite safe. There, I have delivered my message, better than ever message was delivered before, for I have given it word for word, and you may make the best of it."

"Up there, with him alone throughout the night!" said the woodman in a tone of no very great approbation. Yet he may be trusted I think—but still 'twere better not. What will the other feel, when he hears of it? —No matter. It cannot be helped. There is nothing else to be done."

"Oh yes there is," answered the piper; "if you could take them up a stoup of wine, or a black jack of good strong beer, you would do more; for if I judge rightly, they have nothing to keep up the spirits, or support the body, or

amuse the time, unless it be making love, and that is cold work without meat or drink."

"Listen to this fool now!" said the woodman, "how he hits the nail aright—I will go up myself."

"They will not thank you, if you come empty-handed," answered the piper; "and you had better take me with you, to show you the way; for the forest is changed since you last saw it, and there are living trees on the high road, which stop up the paths, and move to and fro."

"I understand thee, piper," answered the woodman. "Thou art a shrewd knave with thine enigmas. Come along with me then. I will try to make thee useful, for the first time in thy life."

"Not useful!" said the piper, as the woodman moved on, taking a branch of the path that led away to the right. "I am the most useful man in the whole hundred. What would weddings be without me, or baptisms either? How many quarrels do my sweet notes allay?

How often do I make peace between man and wife, by drowning her shrill voice by my shriller notes, and outroaring him with my drone? Go to, you would never get on without me—Useful quotha!—But where are you going now? This is not the way to the castle."

"I am going to take thy sage advice," replied the woodman, "which on ordinary occasions is not worth a groat. But we may as well carry up some provisions; and for that purpose, as well as others, I must take my cottage by the way. But now hold thy peace, man, for I would have my thoughts clear."

Thus saying, he strode on before, the piper following, till they reached the broader road, which passed the cottage, and came in sight of the little green.

"Hist, hist," said the piper. "There is some one before the door. It may be one of the soldiers who set fire to the houses."

"Then I will cleave his skull with my axe," answered the woodman, lightly; "but, 'tis only

David. Go on—get thee into the house. I want to speak to him ;" and striding forward, he approached the man, and spoke a few words to him, of which the piper could only distinguish a few, though he was all ears.

" By half-past five," said the woodman, " as many as you can, and well armed."

" At the old castle ?" asked the man.

" Yes," answered the woodman, " under the gateway. The sky will be gray by that time. Quarrel not with the soldiers, if you can help it. Say you are but doing your needful service; but, keep to it sturdily—Nay, now I think of it, 'twere better to gather in the wood, upon the hill below the castle, especially if the soldiers follow you. There, begin hewing down the young trees which we marked for cutting out, and run up to the gate if you should hear my horn. Now away, and bring all you can ; but mind you send Adam up on his pony at once to the abbey."

The man replied not, but ran away with a peculiarly quick but easy trot; and Boyd

entered the hut, where he found the piper standing very near the door. He felt inclined to ask him why he had not gone in, feeling sure that he had lingered to listen ; but there, just before him, stood the great deer hound Ban, neither growling nor attempting to seize the intruder, but gazing at him with a very fierce and formidable expression of countenance, which might well daunt even a stout heart in the breast of an unarmed man. The moment the dog saw his master, however, he dropped his stiffened tail and raised ears; and the woodman said, "Now, Sam, come you with me, and we will load ourselves with food for the nonce. Here, sling this great bottle under your right arm, to balance your bag-pipes, and take this loaf upon your back. I will carry the rest; but I must leave my right hand free, in case of need, to use my weapon.

"But how am I to use my weapon, if you load me so?" asked the piper, making his instrument give a squeak.

"The less you use it the better," answered the woodman.

"I say the same of all weapons," rejoined Sam. "But never mind, put on the load and let us go."

Their arrangements were soon complete, and with a rapid pace they gained once more the edge of the high road, and there paused under the trees, to watch the proceedings of the enemy. The same vigilant patrol was kept up; but the woodman marked it with a smile.

"They think the person they seek, must have taken refuge there," he said in a whisper to his companion, "because he could not pass by the hamlet or the lower road, without falling in with them; but if they keep their parties so loose, I would pass a hundred men across, one by one. I will go first, and you follow. He waited till the next couple of soldiers had ridden slowly by, and then with a silent step crossed to the opposite side of the road, where he paused for his companion; but the poor piper had nearly brought himself into a dangerous situation, by a hankering for the great bottle which hung under his arm. In

extracting, with his stout finger and thumb, the cork from the mouth, he produced a sound loud enough to make two of the soldiers stop, and then ride up to the spot; but his bagpipe once more saved him; for squeezing the bag hard, and running his fingers over the pipe, he produced a series of sounds only to be equalled by those of two cats in a gutter; and one of the soldiers exclaimed:

"It is only that drunken piper again—Cease your squalling, knave, or I'll break your pate."

The sound of the pipe instantly stopped; and the moment the two men had gone on, the piper passed the road and joined his companion. The rest of the way was speedily accomplished; and a little before five, the woodman approached the gates of the old castle. There he paused, and after a moment's thought, turned to his companion, saying:

"It would be a great advantage to us, my good friend, Sam, if we could get some information of the movements of these bands."

"I'll undertake it," said the piper, whom success had made bold. "You shall have tidings of any change in their dance. But, you must give me something to wet my mouth first, Master Boyd."

"Well, well," answered the woodman, "set the bottle to your lips, but only drink to the peg, do you hear. Stay, I'll hold my hand upon it, and stop you in time; for you must leave some for others, and not take too much yourself."

The piper took a deep draught, and was only stayed by his companion snatching the bottle from him. Then followed a consultation, as to what was to be done in the many contingencies which might arise. It was agreed, that if the piper did not return within half an hour after day-break, that the party in the castle should conclude he had been detained by the soldiery; that if he came back without being followed, and having remarked no movement of importance, he should play a low and quiet air upon his instrument; while, on the contrary,

if the soldiers were at his heels, and danger menacing, he should come on with a quick, loud march.

This being settled, he departed on his errand; and passing over the frail remains of the bridge, the woodman entered the great court, where the embers of the fire were still gleaming in the ashes, like the eyes of a wild beast through a thicket. Approaching the door of the hall, he paused and listened, not knowing what might have occurred since the wandering musician had quitted the place. But all was silent; and bending down his head a little, he looked forward into the interior of the hall, through one of the rifts, which had been made violently in the door, at the former siege. The party were nearly in the same position as when the piper had left them, the Arab crouching upon the ground near the fire, which he seemed lately to have supplied with wood, and his dark face resting on his darker hand. Chartley was seated on the footstool, with his feet stretched towards the fire, and his left side leaning against the arm

of the chair. In the chair, was Iola as before; but her eyes were closed. Her hand rested upon Chartley's arm; and her head drooped upon his shoulder, while her balmy breath fanned his cheek, as she slept, tired out by emotions and fatigues.

END OF VOL I.

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